LADY'S MAGAZINE, NO. 2 NOW READY. PRICE 6D.

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 634. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 23RD, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 634.] For the Week Ending February 23rd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

Fooled by a Woman.

THAT something very unusual had happened to the firm of Warde and Crowdey, the Regent Street jewellers, was very evident.

Mr. Warde, the senior member of the firm, was in the shop at the ridiculously late hour of nine o'clock in the evening, and Mr. Warde strode up and down the shop with ill-concealed nervous excitement. Every now and again he stepped to the door and glanced up the street as though expecting someone. That someone was no less an individual than Bart Hocking of Scotland Yard, and he came upon the scene a few minutes before ten o'clock.

"What's wrong now?" he said genially, as he was conducted to the private office in the rear of the shop.

"Everything's gone wrong," said the gentleman who had conducted the detective, "permit me, Mr. Hocking—this is Mr. Gray," with a wave of the hand to the other occupant of the office. "This is a nasty business—a nasty business!"

Mr. Warde, the senior member of the firm, was evidently labouring under considerable excitement he could not control, and he punctuated his remarks by putting his glasses on his nose and then removing them.

"We have been completely done, sir, fleeced—fleeced, Mr. Hocking, and by a woman.

"Mr. Gray is at the head of our diamond department. A shrewd man, too. But I am not surprised that he was taken in by that woman. Why, I was myself completely taken in, sir. I had taken notice of her entrance, and—and observed her somewhat and the purchases she was making. She was a stunner, and no mistake. Why, she was the handsomest woman, the best dressed, well bred, most—most—why, bless me, she would have deceived anyone. She looked like a queen."

Mr. Warde put his glasses on his nose to finish with, and then proceeded to duck his head and look over them at Bart Hocking.

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"Perhaps she is entitled to be called a queen," replied Bart quietly. "The Queen of Diamonds, eh? But come, tell me just how this thing happened."

"Why, this afternoon about two o'clock, a lady walked into the shop," responded the jeweller. "Gray, here," indicating the gentleman with a wave of the hand, "was behind the diamond counter.

"The lady walked straight up to him and presented her card. Show Mr. Hocking that card, Gray."

Gray produced the card, with something very like a groan. It read as follows:

DOCTOR WALTER FARDYCE.

MRS. FARDYCE.

Kensington Gardens, W.

The lady's name was engraved. The physician's name and address were written, apparently with a fine steel pen.

"As soon as she handed that card to me," explained Gray, "she drew it back again instantly as though she had made a mistake. It was very clever, I see now.

"'Oh, I beg your pardon!' she said, 'I didn't notice that that card had writing on it. Somebody's address it seems to be.'

"She adjusted a dainty pair of gold-bowed eyeglasses, and looked at the card.

"'Ah, it's only my husband's name,' she said. 'That does not matter, though I don't know how he happened to write it on my card.'

"She selected a fresh card and gave it to me, and after I had glanced at it, I asked her, as politely as possible"—here Gray ground his teeth—"what could I do for her?"

"'It's my birthday,' she said. 'Isn't it dreadful? They do come round so fast to us women when we are no longer young.'

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"She made a pretty little gesture of regret for old Father Time's ruthless conduct, and then continued:

"'My husband is going to do his best to prevent the day from being a sad one for me. He has promised me a handsome present of diamonds, and, better still, has given me permission to choose them myself. That's what I am here for.'

"I saw a pretty good sale in that, so I immediately began to show her some handsome stones. I happened to know all about Doctor Fardyce, though I'd never seen him nor any of his family. He's a very rich man, and spends money freely. I supposed that he'd lay out at least a thousand pounds on this particular present and might go as high as five thousand.

"But when I saw the lady picking up solitaires and bracelets and necklaces, and laying them aside as if she intended to take them all, I began to stare.

"She didn't ask the price of anything at first, and so, after awhile, I ventured to ask, in the most roundabout way, how much she intended to lay out on her birthday present.

"'Oh, I can have almost anything I want,' she said. 'Dr. Fardyce has sold one of his houses, and he said he'd give me all he got for it, and that I might put it into diamonds, which, he says, are a good investment. I'm quite an expert, you must know, as a buyer.'

"Well, I hadn't supposed so, by the reckless way in which she had chosen thousands upon thousands of pounds worth of stones; but when she began to talk figures I discovered that she'd told only the truth.

"She knew all about diamonds. I didn't get any the best of her. When we had finally listed the articles, and had made prices on paper (which she did very carefully, compelling me to write the figures), I was forced to confess to myself that she really was making a first-class investment.

"Acting under instructions from Mr. Warde, I was willing to sell cheap, and the jewels she got for £10,117 were very cheap. If she sells them again in six months as carefully as she bought, she could make a handsome profit."

"When Gray had made his prices," the jeweller said, taking up the story, "the woman said that she would like her husband to see the stones before closing the sale, and asked if we could send a man from the shop with her to her home. She said the doctor would be there between the hours of three and four, and that he would have accompanied her to make the purchase, but for pressure of business.

"Gray came and asked me about it.

"'Is the woman all right?' I asked.

"'I believe so,' he answered; 'I saw her husband's name on one of her cards. I know his signature. Have seen it often when I was with Tate, Cope and Co.'

"Well, that seemed to settle it. Though, to tell the truth I had no doubts about her and I'm sure Gray had not. I've been watching the sale all the time, and, well, I've told you what I thought of her. I even spoke with her a few minutes, myself, and there wasn't a suggestion of anything wrong in her language or manner. Her story about wanting her husband to see the diamonds first was perfectly plausible, and she even asked for a man to accompany her, for greater safety. I did what I thought was right and even asked her pardon for sending one of the clerks with her.

"She laughed at that, and said she wouldn't dare to take the responsibility of caring for them herself.

"Ackersley, one of our most trustworthy clerks, came over to ask me a question while we were discussing this point, and as he turned away, she said in a low tone.

"'Can't you send that young man with me, he's so polite.'

"Ackersley is a man that one would notice and like at the first glance. He is a fine-looking fellow and dresses like a west-end swell, always. I don't mean loud, but well.

"I didn't think the request at all strange. Our messenger was of course to accompany her and she naturally wanted as gentlemanly a fellow as possible."

At this point Gray tore at his moustache viciously.

"I don't know what was the matter with us," he said. "It seems as if we must have been blind. Certainly the game was open enough."

"Gray thinks that Ackersley was in it," said Warde.

"Why?" asked Bart.

"Because he hasn't come back," said Gray somewhat warmly.

"There are several reasonable explanations of that fact," rejoined the detective. "Before I discuss them, let me learn just what you have done."

"In the first place," replied Warde, "I must tell you that the woman and Ackersley rode away together in the carriage in which she had come."

"It was an open carriage. I stood at the door of the store when they started. There was Ackersley with the jewel case on his knee. There was the coachman in full livery sitting on the box as if he was driven into it, and there was the woman, handsome as a picture and wonderfully young-looking. By the way, Gray, how old should you think she was?"

"Forty-five, at least," growled Gray.

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Warde. "She didn't look much over thirty. I'm particular about this, for it may account for any influence she has exercised over Ackersley."

"Perhaps," said Gray, "but I guess the plunder is the main thing with him. He has been living beyond his means."

"Well, to return to the story," said Warde, "it had been agreed that Ackersley should come back with the diamonds, or Doctor Fardyce's cheque for them, as soon as possible.

"We thought he might not be able to make it by six o'clock—the hour when we close—so it was arranged that Gray should stay here a while and wait for him."

"So I did," said Gray, taking up the story. "I had dinner sent in, and I remained here after the shop was closed engaged in some work with a lot of new stones which I recently purchased for the firm.

"Time slipped away fast, and it was eight o'clock before I realised it. It was so quiet that I heard when Big Ben struck an hour, and at that very moment it flashed through me that Ackersley should have been back, and that something was wrong.

"I picked up a telephone book, and found that there was a 'phone in Doctor Fardyce's house. Then I could have kicked myself for not using it in the afternoon.

"I rang the call. The operator at the Exchange said that that instrument had been taken out of the house, but that Doctor Fardyce had one in his sanatorium in Surrey, though it wasn't in the book.

"Of course I asked her to give me the sanatorium. Doctor Fardyce was there. He came to the 'phone.

"I told him that Mrs. Fardyce had called at our shop in the afternoon; but he interrupted me right there, to say that Mrs. Fardyce was in Liverpool.

"Without letting him know that a robbery had

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actually been committed, I satisfied myself beyond a doubt that the woman was an impostor, and that, in short, we had been done.

"Then I telegraphed to Mr. Warde. He replied that he would come down to the shop.

"On the way down, however, he struck the idea of going to Fardyce's town house. He did so, and found it closed."

"They haven't lived there since the first part of the summer," said Mr. Warde. "I learned that from the neighbours."

"But here's the curious part of it. Beyond question, the woman and Ackersley drove to that house. The people living on the other side of the street told me so.

"The carriage stopped before the house. The coachman got down from the box and went in by the area door. Presently he came out, and seemed to deliver a message to the people in the carriage.

"Then he got on the seat again, and the carriage drove off. I wasn't able to trace it beyond that point, so I came on here, telegraphed to Scotland Yard for you, and here we are."

"It's a very pretty case,' said Bart. "I'm glad to get into it."

As he said these words there was a noise of hoofs and wheels, and a carriage stopped before the store.

Warde stepped to the door, unlocked it, and the next moment two women entered hurriedly, and in evident excitement.

THE MAN BY THE ROADSIDE.

"Mrs. Ackersley," exclaimed Warde, "what has brought you here?"

The person addressed was a sweet-faced lady somewhat past middle-age. She was accompanied by an extremely handsome girl. Both were very well-dressed, though not expensively, but as ladies of slender means and abundant good taste dress when they are going out to some evening entertainment.

"My son," cried Mrs. Ackersley; "I am anxious about him."

Warde was on the point of disclosing the whole matter with a directness which might have been sufficient to seriously endanger the life of a woman as delicate as Mrs. Ackersley seemed to be. A sign from Bart warned him.

"Why are you anxious about him?" asked Warde, restraining himself.

"He was to meet us at the theatre," said Mrs. Ackersley, "and he did not do so. He had said that he might be quite late, and had told us to remain through the performance.

"We did so, though at the last we became quite anxious about him. But when we got to my home and found that he had not been there, we were alarmed.

"Oh, has something happened to him? I seem to read it in your face that—that——"

"Miss Enid"—indicating the handsome girl—"remembered that Arthur has sometimes been detained here very late, and so she suggested driving down here. Oh, has something happened to him? I seem to read in your face that—that——"

She stopped, overcome by her feelings.

"To be frank with you," said Warde kindly, "we do not know where your son is, and we, also, are anxious about him."

Mrs. Ackersley gasped for breath, and would have fallen but for Bart's arm. Miss Enid, too, was prompt to render assistance, though it was evident that she could scarcely find the strength to do so.

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Bart had not lost a single detail of this scene. He had noticed, besides what has been related, an interchange of glances, rapid as thought, between Miss Enid and Gray.

They were distrust and suspicion on the one side, and a suggestion of malicious triumph on the other, which were full of meaning to the keen detective.

"Am I right in supposing," he said to Mrs. Ackersley, "that Miss Enid and your son are on terms of very close friendship?"

"They are to be married," replied the lady.

Gray scowled.

"So I ventured to imagine," said Bart; but whether he referred to the engagement or to Gray's frown may be a matter of conjecture.

He did not pursue the subject, but, anticipating the questions that were on the lady's lips, he told the story of the diamond robbery so far as it is known to the reader.

This he did in the gentlest manner, but it was an ugly story at the best.

There seemed to be only two alternatives. Either Ackersley was in the plot, or he had suffered some injury at the hands of the plotters.

It was impossible to account for his failure to return or to communicate with the girl in any other way. True he might be a prisoner, but such was improbable to say the least.

"It looks bad for your son, there is no denying," said Gray to Mrs. Ackersley. "He was implicitly trusted by Mr. Warde. But we all hope even now that he will prove to be honest."

"You need have no anxiety on that score," said Miss Enid. "He will."

"That's how the wind blows, is it?" was Bart's mental comment, as he took in every expression and gesture of those about him. "Gray is in love with the young lady, and jealous of his rival and nothing will suit his purpose better than to have Ackersley found guilty."

"Allow me to remark that I quite agree with you, Miss Enid," he said aloud.

Mr. Warde and the two ladies looked very much relieved, and the former took occasion to remark:

"This is Mr. Bart Hocking of Scotland Yard. You have heard of him?"

The mother at once appealed to the detective.

"Tell me," she said, "do you think my son is safe, or that he has suffered at the hands of some dreadful criminals?"

"From all I can learn there is but one criminal in this case, so far, and that is this woman. Who her accomplices are and how they have worked I have yet to find out. Your son was young and strong, and was doubtless able to take care of himself. It is certain, however, that he has met with some difficulty in the discharge of his duty, and it remains for us to help him out of it.

"The greatest help you can render me at present, ladies, is to go home and remain there until we communicate with you. Should Mr. Ackersley return home, telegraph at once to Scotland Yard."

The ladies reluctantly yielded to Bart's persuasion, and at once bade good-night and were driven home.

As the door was closed behind them Bart Hocking turned to Gray and said:

"I wish you would remain here constantly, Mr. Gray. Should Ackersley turn up, communicate with headquarters. Mr. Warde, will you accompany me?"

The famous detective and the jeweller went out together, and, hailing a cab, Bart Hocking gave directions to be driven to the house in Kensington Gardens.

"We must trace that carriage from this point," said Bart, when they had arrived.

"Impossible," exclaimed his companion.

Bart smiled.

"Nothing is impossible," he said.

Some think that this tracing of a person or a vehicle is simply a matter of asking questions. They are mistaken. It requires skill and an intelligent perception, of which an untrained mind has no conception. With the born detective, there is to be sure a great deal of instinct—a sort of second sight.

Although it was far past midnight when they set out, Bart was able to follow that carriage along the route it took through the city streets. It took a great deal of patient work, the asking of innumerable questions, and much profound reasoning.

At last Bart and his companion made their way to the nearest hackney stand, and the detective looked carefully at the horses, eventually selecting one, that showed he was an excellent judge of horse flesh and knew when the qualities of speed and endurance are apparent.

A few words of direction to cabby, and they were off as fast as they coul l safely go.

"Where are you going?" asked Warde, in a tone of bewilderment.

"We are going to visit the sanatorium of Dr. Fardyce, in Surrey. I want to ask the gentleman a few questions."

"But, my dear sir, he can't possibly know anything about it."

"Possibly not."

"You don't suspect him?" asked Mr. Warde in consternation.

"No. I can't say I do. I'm not doing any suspecting yet. But I am not going to his asylum as a patient. No; my brain is working all right, I think, and I am quite sure Dr. Fardyce can have no conscious connection with this affair."

"Then why are you going there? By Jove, I have an idea! I wonder it didn't occur to me before."

"What is your idea?"

"Why, Fardyce keeps a lunatic asylum."

"That's the size of it, although he talks, or rather writes—for I've read some of his stuff—about diseases of the brain as though you could wash them out of the head with a shampoo."

"His patients are crazy. Now you've got my idea. This thing was done by a patient who imagined she was the doctor's wife."

The detective laughed heartily.

"You are ingenious at conjecture, but it won't work."

Mr. Warde looked hurt.

"I'm simply following the trail of that carriage."

"Why, how do you know——"

"Look here! This woman said she was going to see her husband. She drove up to the town house. Of course, she knew that it was closed.

"That was only a starter. She couldn't turn any trick with a man like Ackersley in broad day and in the city streets.

"In short, she had to take him somewhere else. Where? Why, of course, to Doctor Fardyce's other residence—to his sanatorium or lunatic asylum or whatever you call it.

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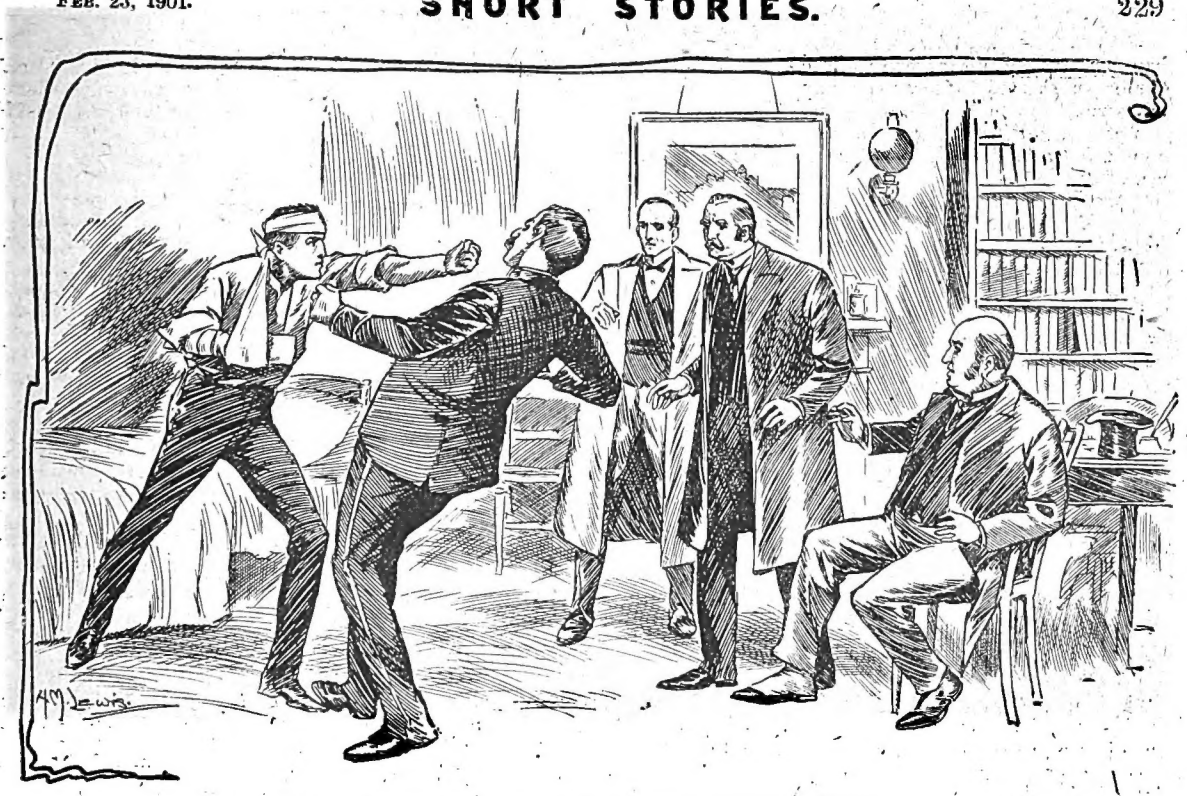

"He staggered to his feet and struck straight out."

"That's in quite an open country. It would give some chance for the job to be done.

"And it would have seemed quite natural to Ackersley that they should go there. Of course, that coachman who pretended to go into the house delivered a satisfactory message explaining why the doctor wished his wife to bring the diamonds to the sanatorium.

"To make this conclusion perfectly sure, I traced the carriage for some distance in this direction. I have no doubt now as to its destination."

"But what do you think became of Ackersley?"

Bart's brow darkened.

"I'm afraid he's been roughly dealt with, but Nan Oldham has always had the reputation of avoiding violence."

"Nan Oldham? Who is she?"

"The woman in the case. I recognised her at once by the description. She's one of the finest confidence operators in the world. She ought to be, for she's been at it since she was ten years old, and she's now forty-nine, or will be on the twenty-ninth of this month."

"Is it possible? By Jupiter! What a head you must have! Why, you recognise this thief in a flash; you knew what she was doing before you were born, and you name her birthday as if she were a member of your own family."

"I'm quite at home in the great and ancient family of Crook," laughed Bart; "it's an interesting family, and repays study."

They flew along over the excellent roads. Day broke, but mistily, so that it was not yet light when they entered the ground surrounding the sanatorium.

A large and dense grove completely hid the house The private way wound through the shadows of the great trees, as if seeking the darkest spots.

His eyes seemed to pierce the shadows.

Suddenly "Halt!" he cried, and sprang out. The light of his lantern flashed upon the way. He seemed to be taking measurements.

"The carriage passed here," he said. "It went in, and it returned. Of course, I can't be sure of this; but I obtained one fairly good imprint of the wheels while we were tracing. The carriage was unusually wide. Drive on; I will walk a few steps. Hold."

The last word was uttered softly, but with a thrill that struck to Warde's heart.

Bart's figure, too, might have been a sculptured ideal of Attention.

Suddenly he leaped over some low shrubbery, and vanished instantly from Warde's view.

That was too much for Warde. His curiosity, reinforced by a nervous dread of some terrible disclosure, got quite the better of him.

He leaped out and sprang forward toward the spot where Bart had stood, the horse frightened by the sudden movement, dashed ahead, and went careering up the avenue with a clatter of hoofs, and a rattle of the swaying vehicle.

"What's that?" called Bart.

"Cabby has lost control of his horse."

"Let them go. Come here."

A light shone among the trees. It was close by the road, but a dense shadow had hitherto hidden Bart. The lantern's light had been thrown upon the ground, but

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when Bart turned, at the noise of the runaway cab, the light became visible and guided Warde.

He, too, leaped over the little hedge-row, and found Bart standing beside a dark object which lay huddled upon the ground, upon the gnarled roots of a great tree.

UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERY.

"Is this Ackersley?" said Bart.

He had turned the man upon his back. The light of the lantern flashed upon his face.

Warde shuddered.

"I don't know," he said. "I shouldn't recognise him. He's dead of course."

"No, he isn't dead, and he isn't going to die."

"What? With that face!"

"That's only a bruise. It looks rather gruesome, I admit, but in a week's time, he will look as well as ever."

"I shouldn't know him," said Warde, "Yet, it looks like him. Yes, it must be he. But, hold on! These aren't his clothes."

"Sure?"

"Perfectly. There's nothing fashionable about this rig."

"I should say not," responded the detective. "The same idea crossed my mind."

"What ails him?"

"He's got a bad cut on the inside of his right arm, and he has fainted from loss of blood. Why he didn't bleed to death is a question which I leave to his guardian angel. However, he is safe now, I have stopped the bleeding. We must take him to the house."

Steps were heard on the walk. Men were running. The light of a lantern flashed among the trees.

A burly man leaped over the low hedge and confronted them, holding up the lantern so that the light struck into their faces.

"What are you doing here?" he cried.

"We were coming out to see Dr. Fardyce," replied Bart, "and we found this wounded man in the grounds."

The fellow with the lantern bent forward. Then he shouted to someone in the road.

"It's him! Here he is!"

"Who?" asked Bart blandly.

"An insane patient from the sanatorium," responded the man. "He escaped during the night. Is he dead?"

"No, he will come to himself soon. What's his name?"

"Al Hayman. I don't know any more about him. Dr. Fardyce can answer your questions if he thinks best."

At this moment cabby drove up slowly, having regained control of his horse. The wounded person was carried out and put into the cab.

The newly-risen sun by this time was dispersing the mists and paling the lantern's light

They drove to the house. On the veranda of the large and handsome building they saw Dr. Fardyce, a tall, high-shouldered man, with a tremendous mass of hair that was almost white, though he seemed not to be very old.

"You've got him, have you?" he asked. "Who are these men?"

Bart was not slow in effecting an introduction, though he did not allow it to delay proceedings. It is Bart's peculiar faculty that he always directs when he wishes to do so. He asked the doctor who the wounded man was.

"He's a patient committed in the usual way to my care."

"By whom?"

"By his mother, under the advice and certification of physicians, as the law directs. Here are the papers."

"Doctor Fields, Doctor Lee, Doctor Warren Graham," murmured Bart, glancing at the document. "I know the first two, but not the last."

"He is, I understand, a very competent physician. He was here yesterday when this young man was committed."

"Spare man, not above medium size, close-trimmed beard and moustache, very bright blue-grey eyes?" asked Bart.

"Yes."

"I know him. Please tell the whole story."

"Well," replied Doctor Fardyce, "it was the day before yesterday when the young man's mother came here. She described her son's case to me.

"It seems that he suffered from melancholia, accompanied by the usual delusions and other adverse symptoms. He had, for instance, the delusion of persecution—very common, as you know. When irritated, so she told me, he imagined that he was being robbed, etc., etc. Common enough.

"Well, she examined my establishment with the utmost care. She inspected the kitchens, the bedrooms, the sanitary arrangements—everything.

"I have never seen a more intelligent woman, nor one of more refined and cultivated manner and conversation.

"At last she expressed herself satisfied. She promised to bring her son the next day.

"She arrived promptly, accompanied by the son—whom you see here—and by Doctor Graham.

"The young man seemed perfectly calm, but his mother was evidently labouring under violent agitation. When she came into the parlour I was not present. In fact, on seeing her approach, I had gone to summon two of my assistants, for I feared a scene. She had prepared me for it.

"The two assistants, one of whom is now present," he pointed to a broad-shouldered fellow, who was attempting to revive the patient, "came into the room before me.

"The lady, the son, and Doctor Graham were there. Suddenly the lady's feelings overcame her.

"She flung her arms around the young man's neck and began to bid him the most affectionate adieu.

"Of course, that was very injudicious. He became violent so my assistants tell me, in a moment.

"The mother attempted to get out of the room. The son raved, and declared that he was being robbed.

"You see, that was his delusion. His mother had prepared us for that.

"Finally he sprang towards his mother, who had attempted to leave the room, and my assistants were obliged to seize him.

"They pinioned his hands. His mother, with tears in her eyes, kissed him while my men held him, and then tore herself away, followed by Doctor Graham.

"And accompanied by ten thousand one hundred and seventeen pounds worth of diamonds belonging to you, Mr. Warde," said Bart, "I guess the game is clear enough now."

"What?" gasped Warde and the doctor in one breath.

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"Certainly," said Bart. "The woman was Nan Oldham, the celebrated confidence operator; the 'doctor' was her husband; the coachman on the box was in reality her son; and the pretended son was your clerk, Ackersley who now lies here bruised and unconscious."

The two men were speechless. Bart continued:

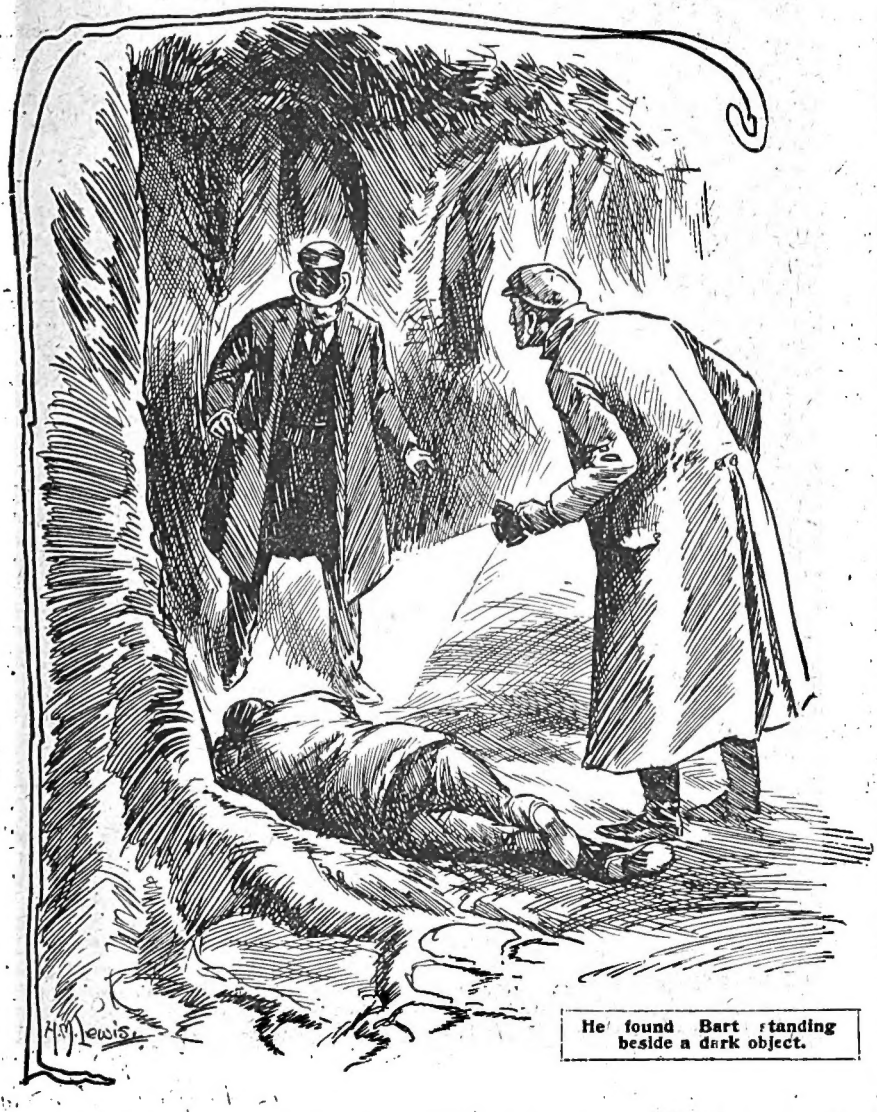
"I can see how it was done. That husband of hers is really a doctor, but he's much more of an actor. It must have been he who played the lunatic, and was examined by Dr. Fields and Dr. Lee.

"Then, you see, when the certificate was made out, the husband, Oldham, had the two doctors' signatures. He merely put on Dr. Graham's name in order that he might pass for a doctor out here."

"But the diamonds——" Warde began.

"They will be recovered; I have notified the police. Oldham and his wife will be arrested."

It may be well to say that this was actually the case.



He found Bart standing beside a dark object.

When Bart had spoken, a noise was heard in that corner of the room where Ackersley lay on a couch.

"He's coming to," said the attendant.

Neither before nor since is there a case of such a remarkable recovery in all Bart's experience.

Ackersley woke from his stupor almost as a man wakes in the morning. He gazed wonderingly round. Then the condition of things was explained to him.

Then Ackersley told how the woman had taken him to the city house, how the coachman had brought out the pretended message that Dr. Fardyce had been unexpectedly called to the asylum, how the woman had persuaded him to go there.

Then came the scene in the parlour, his surprise when the woman suddenly flung her arms around his neck and began to call him "her dear son," his wrath when, overpowered by the two strong men, he saw her take the box of jewels from the table, where he had put it, and walk off with it.

In the struggle which he had made to free himself, his clothes were torn to shreds, and both the attendants received mementoes of his skill as a boxer.

But he was finally caged in a room with barred windows, where he yelled and raved until he was worn out.

In the night he had escaped by wrenching the bars off the window and breaking the sash.

As he climbed through, he cut himself with a piece of the window glass, but he did not think it was serious. The flow of blood, however, soon weakened him, and he fell unconscious beside the road, toppling over the low hedge and string face downward upon the roots of the tree. He remembered no more.

It is needless to say that the fortunate conclusion of the adventure carried joy to Mrs. Ackersley and Miss Enid—a joy which Mr. Gray could not share.

"There's one particularly curious thing about this case," said Bart in summing up after the arrest of the Oldhams and the recovery of the diamonds. "This woman's mother worked almost the same game in Liverpool nearly fifty years ago. Now, as the mother died when this girl was an infant, and it's doubtful whether the daughter ever heard of it, we find this problem—Did Nan Oldham inherit the game? Was it implanted in her brain? I think I'll send this to the Society for Psychical Research."

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A BARD OF THE "HALLS."

"You knows I ain't a 'ard woman, Mister Jessip; but pay me somethin' this week you must, or I'll 'ave to let your room to somebody else. Times is bad; here's my own flesh an' blood to think on an' the struggle it is for a pore widder like me to——"

"I think I shall be able to manage something this week, Mrs. Batty—perhaps to-day. I'm just off now to try my luck."

"There mustn't be no thinkin' about it. Onless you can settle up the back rent, you réal'y must make room for somebody as can pay reg'lar. 'Eaven knows, I wouldn't speak so crool if I wasn't obliged; but it's a dooty I owes to my children when they ain't gettin' none too much to eat. You see 'ow I'm placed?"

"Yes, yes; you've been very good to me, and nothing would please me better than to square up. Anyhow, wish me luck at the Corner to-day. I've written a song for Hyde—the famous Arnold Hyde, you know. I fancy he'll like it."

"I 'ope 'e will, an' that 'e'll pay you somethin' 'andsome."

"We shall see about that. Well, good-morning, Mrs. Batty; I'll be back as soon as I can."

And, opening the street-door—for the foregoing colloquy had taken place in the passage—Mrs. Batty's second-floor-back left the house.

"Pore feller!" mused the landlady, as she retired to her kitchen; "'twas a 'ard job to tell 'im 'e must go, 'e do look that mortal bad—but there, I 'ad to do it."

His eyes fixed on the pavement, Paul Jes op slowly made his way towards the eastern end of York Road, Lambeth. It was Monday morning; that morning of the week on which all sorts and conditions of folks connected with the "variety" profession assemble at the spot known as "Poverty Corner."

Ever since music-halls have existed, "the Corner" has been the Monday morning rendezvous of artistes, agents, managers, song-writers, and certain mysterious nondescripts who go there on Heaven knows what business. The "stars" usually drive up to the Corner, and swagger into the saloon of the adjacent tavern, where portly, overdressed agents and proprietors await them with contracts ready for signature. The failures of the profession cool their heels on the spacious pavement outside, discuss the prospects of something turning up, and try to borrow shillings from any fellow-pro. who was lucky enough to be "in work" during the previous week.

It was among the seedy ones of the pavement that Paul Jessop took his stand. Though the day was bitterly cold, he, like many others present, wore no overcoat. His clothes, originally of none too stout a texture, were nearly threadbare, his boots were decidedly leaky; and as his diet for several days past had consisted of dry bread and weak tea, it was small wonder that he looked somewhat pinched and haggard.

Paul Jessop was a poet—a bard of the halls. It was an unlucky night for him when his maiden effusion was graciously accepted by a third-rate comic vocalist appearing at the "Bijou," a minor north-London hall. At that time Jessop was managing a little grocery establishment for his aged mother, and, being on friendly terms with the proprietor of the neighbouring "Bijou," he was almost a nightly frequenter of the place. He hobnobbed with the performers, stood them whiskies, and sometimes "went behind." Then, being ambitious, he had ground out four verses of doggerel with a chorus commencing "We're the boys who Never Pass a Pub," which, with some diffidence, he submitted to Arnold Hyde, an obscure artiste who was glad enough to render three songs a night for as many pounds per week.

Hyde voted Paul Jessop's ditty "rippin'."

"I'll get Jimmy Brett to do the melody for it," he remarked with enthusiasm. "Set to a good tune, this thing o' yours 'll fairly knock 'em. It's great! You must do some more for me, my boy; there's coin to be made at the song-writin' biz—'eaps o' coin!"

The verses were duly set to a jingling melody, and Arnold Hyde sang the ditty. His prophecy proved correct—"We're the Boys who Never Pass a Pub" was to the public's taste; it delighted music-hall audiences, and was soon all over the town. 'Arrys and 'Arriets bawled the chorus as, with linked arms, they paraded the streets; every orgin-grinder added the tune to his *répertoire*; and the publishers of the song sold thousands of copies.

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Arnold Hyde's agent quickly pushed him to the front and at a bound the erstwhile third-rater became a "star," worked three big halls a night, and was driven thither in a brougham.

Paul Jessop, the writer of the "roof-raiser," received a guinea as his reward; Jimmy Brett, the composer, was paid thirty shillings (but then, he provided a set of "band-parts" in addition to the bare melody).

Hyde himself received several snug cheques from the music-publishers on account of the royalties; and as the ditty also made his reputation, he had reason to be tolerably satisfied with his bargain.

His initial success as a song-writer, proved the undoing of Paul Jessop. He began to neglect the grocery business, haunted the West-end and variety-palaces, and struck up expensive friendships in taverns of professional resort.

He wrote another song, which Hyde purchased "outright" for three guineas. This second attempt, entitled "I'll Never Take In Lodgers Any More," though not so successful as the first, was nevertheless popular. It strengthened Hyde's reputation, and brought him in money, for the song sold exceedingly well when published.

At his mother's death, which occurred about this time, Paul Jessop inherited the little grocery business. He engaged a man to attend to the shop; but, as things didn't flourish, Jessop sold the stock and goodwill for something less than a hundred pounds. Then he migrated to the south side of the Thames, and became a professional song-writer.

For a time his earnings averaged about a pound per week, for at the outset Arnold Hyde paid him the fixed sum of three guineas a song. As, however, Jessop failed to produce another "We're the Boys, etc.," the price was soon reduced by one half. Other artistes for whom he wrote paid anything from two guineas to five shillings.

Upon his earnings and the money realised by the sale of the business, Paul Jessop subsisted for a while. Then he contracted a serious illness, and, as the doctor's bill ran away with all but a few sovereigns of his scanty reserve fund, he deemed it prudent to seek cheaper lodgings.

Accordingly, he engaged a single room in a dingy street off the Waterloo Road, and at first paid the worthy Mrs. Batty's bill with commendable regularity. Soon, however, his money gave out, and arrears began to accumulate.

Jessop had never been a ready rhymester, but, since his illness, the composition even of such stuff as passed muster at the halls had become a species of torture. Nor would ideas come as formerly. Cudgel his brains as he would, his output dwindled both in quantity and quality, and during the last month he had disposed of one solitary song for the princely sum of seven-and-sixpence.

Thus things had gone from bad to worse, until at length Widow Batty, seeing no prospect of an improvement in the financial position of her second-floor-back, had been forced to "speak out" in the manner above related.

Paul Jessop had one ray of hope this morning. In his pocket was the MS. of a song written for his first patron, Arnold Hyde. The conception, writing, and touching-up of this effusion represented several days' hard labour, and the author was well satisfied with the result. It was a convivial ditty, written in Jessop's best style, and—what was a most important detail—it had a promising "catch-line."

"I'll ask four guineas for it," mused Jessop, as he shivered at the Corner, "perhaps Hyde will give that—it's a long time since he's had a real success."

Presently Hyde arrived in a smart trap, jumped out, and hurried into the saloon bar. Jessop waited about twenty minutes; then, judging that the comedian had probably settled what business he had with his agent, he entered the place.

Hyde was just standing brandies and ninepenny cigars to a knot of prosperous-looking cronies, when Jessop touched him upon the sleeve.

"Hullo!" he said, turning, "got something to show me?"

Jessop nodded, whereupon Hyde drained his glass, and led the way to a quiet corner of the bar.

"What's it like this time?" grumbled the comedian. "Those last things I had of you were rotten frosts—dear at a bob a time. I can't get hold of a decent song lately. Why don't you write me something as'll fetch 'em?"

Paul Jessop offered the MS. by way of reply.

"Um! this might go down," observed Hyde, after a hasty perusal. "How much?"

The poet nervously suggested four guineas, whereat the other laughed boisterously.

"Well, you've got a nerve, I don't think!" he remarked. "Why, I can get reams o' stuff like this at half-a-dollar a verse. Four guineas! I wonder you don't say five while you're about it!"

A quarter of an hour later, Paul Jessop was walking wearily to his lodgings. In his pocket was ten and sixpence. The great Arnold Hyde had promised him "a bit extra" in the event of the new song catching on.

* * * * *

Three weeks elapsed before "Oh Lor! Didn't We Shift the Gargle" was tried in public. The song was an instant, an unqualified success; "it fair paralysed em," to use Hyde's own expression. At each of the halls where he appeared the gallery seized lustily upon the chorus, and that "Oh Lor Didn't We Shift the Gargle" would be the song for some time to come was patent to everybody who understood the signs.

On the night that witnessed Hyde's great triumph there halted outside St. ——'s Hospital, a police-ambulance. From it was lifted an inanimate form. A moment's examination was sufficient. "A hopeless case! He won't live another hour," said the doctor.

* * * * *

Many Monday mornings came and went, and Arnold Hyde wondered why Jessop failed to show up at the corner. "I must give the poor devil a couple o' quid, I suppose," said the "star." "'Didn't We Shift the Gargle' is a fair ripper—it'll go for months yet."

The ditty did go for months. Hyde, whose popularity and salary had been steadily declining, once more became a prime favourite; his name appeared upon the bills in the largest of type, and his terms went up to a high figure. Royalties on the sale of "Oh Lor! Didn't We Shift the Gargle," also swelled his banking-account appreciably.

But he has never had an opportunity of rewarding the "poor devil" of an author. For Paul Jessop lived barely an hour after his admittance to St. ——'s Hospital, and, in due course, the coroner recorded a verdict of death from starvation and exposure.

The parish saw to the burial.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Afghan War of 1842. "The Army of Retribution."

ALTHOUGH it may be urged that having been guilty of the supreme folly of forcing on so proud and warlike a race as the Afghans a sovereign whom they hated, the reverses we subsequently experienced were a just punishment for the folly of our policy, still it was absolutely necessary on political grounds that the disaster which had befallen our arms in our ignominious retreat from Afghanistan in 1841 should be avenged.

Our humiliation had been great. Of the 21,000 fighting men, 30,000 camp followers, and 30,000 camels which had crossed the Indus to seat Shah Soojah on the throne a few thousands were left, but the whole of the Cabul division, which numbered 5,000, under General Elphinstone, had perished, with the exception of one man, whilst of the others General Sale was besieged at Jellalabad, and General Nott was surrounded at Candahar.

But there were other reasons besides the restoration of our prestige why a moment should not be lost in sending out an "Army of Retribution."

Lady Sale and her daughter, Lady Macnaghtan, and the wives of three officers, and three privates, were in the hands of the Afghans; in addition, General Shelton, Colonel Palmer, Major Pottinger, Major Griffith, twelve captains, nine lieutenants, three ensigns, three surgeons, and twenty-eight non-commissioned officers and privates. General Elphinstone had died in captivity.

Preparations for invading Afghanistan were pushed on with feverish haste. After much deliberation the command of the "Army of Retribution" was vested in General Pollock whose ability as an officer, in addition to a wonderful shrewdness of character, would be of great service in counteracting the egotistical timidity of Lord Ellenborough, the new Governor General, a clever but weak man.

In April, 1842, General Pollock and 8,000 men left Peshawar to relieve the "Illustrious garrison of Sale" as it was called, in India, and Nott at Candahar. A new line of advance was selected. No General had ever conveyed at that time a body of troops through the formidable Khyber Pass.

The news of our approach quickly spread amongst the fierce native mountain tribes, and on our arrival we found over 10,000 Khyberees ready to contend our advance. But the mountaineers had to contend, in the person of the British general, with one even more wily than themselves, and a body of British troops burning to avenge the late disastrous defeat. Finding the enemy posted in strong force on the precipitous cliffs lining the pass, General Pollock sent a couple of strong columns to scale the rugged heights and take the enemy on either side in the rear.

These admirable tactics so bewildered the Khyberees that our main body was enabled to traverse the pass and demolish the barrier which had been erected at the other end. This success, especially as our losses were only fourteen killed and 104 wounded, greatly elated the troops. But much remained to be accomplished.

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The country to be traversed was as full of defensive positions as that round Ladysmith in Natal. Indeed, the efforts of General Pollock to relieve General Sale of Jellalabad bore striking resemblance to the Natal operations of General Buller.

On April 6th Ali Musjid was attacked, and after a series of desperate encounters, lasting several days, the enemy were driven headlong from all their positions, and the road to Jellalabad was clear. Jellalabad relieved, and none too soon, Pollock was making arrangements for the relief of General Nott at Candahar when the vacillating Governor-General sent an order peremptorily forbidding Pollock to advance.

The Governor-General was greatly alarmed because he had heard that Brigadier England and a portion of General Nott's army had suffered a reverse at Hykulzye. Why General Nott was to be left to his fate because General England had been defeated is not clear.

Pollock obeyed his instructions, but he allowed General Sale to sally forth and attack Akbar Khan's camp. Such was the daring of the troops—a striking contrast to the column which perished under Elphinstone—that, on nearing the enemy, the artillery galloped to the front, their accurate discharges throwing the Afghan centre into such confusion, that two strong columns of our infantry coming up at the double were able to come to close quarters with the bayonet.

The Afghans fought in the most gallant style. The way their horsemen charged down on us would have done credit to our own cavalry, but as the British soldier is never so dangerous as after a reverse, the field was soon covered with riderless horses. There was no task too hazardous for our men to accomplish that day. Great damage was done during one of our flanking movements by an Afghan battery of three guns, screened by a garden wall, the serving of which was superintended by Akbar Khan in person. A wild rush, a British cheer, and in a trice the wall was scaled, and the gunners cut to pieces, Akbar Khan himself narrowly escaping capture.

It is said that the elation exhibited by our men when they learnt that these three guns they had taken were part of the artillery lost by the Cabul force under Elphinstone, was something to remember. Strong men flung themselves on these mute witnesses of their country's dishonour, kissing and hugging them as if they were alive.

Although the day was practically over, our men could not rest content till the recovered artillery had regained its lost character, so they at once turned on the foe. About 5 p.m., the Afghan camp caught fire, burning the whole of their tents. This completed their discomfiture. During the retreat, we captured all their food, munitions, standards, besides killing some thousands, including many of their most powerful chiefs. Our own loss was trifling, three officers and about fifty wounded, in addition to casualties among the native troops.

To have been soundly thrashed by the very force they had been blockading was a deep mortification to the Afghans. But the retirement of General England to Quetta, although quite an unimportant affair, still weighed so heavily on the spirits of the Governor-General that he ordered General Nott to evacuate Candahar, and retreat to the Indus, after demolishing the defences and blowing up the gateways. As Nott was not a general of the retiring order he, naturally, deeply resented his instructions, but fearful lest the command of his force should be transferred to one of the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Jasper Nicholls, who had disapproved of the expedition, he obeyed.

The moment it became known in India that Lord Ellenborough had resolved on the evacuation of the country a storm of indignation arose. This so unnerved India's ruler that Pollock, who had been also peremptorily ordered by Sir Jasper Nicholls to retreat, wrote, stating with sarcastic emphasis, that the retirement would involve the sacrifice of the captives, to say nothing of an additional loss of prestige. To this the Governor-General replied, reiterating the order to evacuate the country, but giving the two generals permission to select their own route.

General Pollock and Nott, being officers who placed the honour of their country above all other considerations, and having implicit confidence in their men, were not long in devising a plan, which enabled them to fulfil his lordship's instructions and still preserve the honour of the country.

On August 10th General Pollock left Jellalabad to return to India. He did not make for his destination in as straight a line as the Governor-General or Sir Jasper Nicholls would have liked, for he marched to Jugdulluk. Finding there a strong force of Ghilzees he at once attacked them.

The British soldier is, as a rule, no politician, but tell him that as the country is to be evacuated, the chances of engaging the enemy will be strictly limited and he realises that he is expected to do his work thoroughly when the time comes.

Tommy, being fully persuaded that there was something wrong in Calcutta, resolved to put matters right in Afghanistan. So our men buckled to. They stormed apparently inaccessible positions, they climbed towering heights, and routed the Ghilzees from positions regarded as impregnable. In short, Mr. Atkins showed such zeal that day that Akbar Khan became so alarmed, that after sending his captives into Turkistan, he collected a large army and met us at Tezeer, the very pass in which a few months before so many of our poor fellows had been massacred.

It was a great mistake for Akbar to fix on Tezeer as a battle ground, for the moment our men heard the truth they literally burned for the fray to begin. What cared they if the plains were alive with the enemy's cavalry and that their footmen swarmed in the hills? The more there were, the more there would be to kill. So the moment they caught sight of the enemy they rushed pell mell at them.

The Afghans, being as clever as the Boers in taking cover, strove to check their advance. But what hope was there of preventing our men reaching the top when at every step they passed the skeletons of their dead comrades? It is said that what with emotion and excitement, our men's faces were bathed in perspiration and tears when they reached the top. Then they wiped their faces and chased the enemy from off those frowning hills. They felt, at last, that the army was fulfilling its mission, and an "Army of Retribution" it did prove itself to be that day.

Akbar and his chiefs, knowing that on the issue of this battle depended the fate of the capital and their relatives, fought with an energy of despair. If they had been wise they would have removed the corpses of their victims beforehand

Next day the troops, maddened by the horrible sights which met their gaze, literally drove the enemy before them right through the formidable pass of Khurd

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They chased the enemy from off those frowning hills.

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Kabul. They strove to delay us by seizing various strong posts in the heights above, but as the day wore on the fury of our men so got on their nerves that, despite all the exertions of Akbar and his chiefs, the Afghans took to flight.

They screwed their courage up at Buth-huk, but the stern, set faces, and the bayonets of our men dislodged them so effectually, that finding the road clear, General Pollock, on August 14th, pitched his tents outside Cabul, and two days later, with his staff and a strong escort, entered the Bala Hissar. There were shorter ways to India than the way he had travelled, but as a band playing "God Save the Queen" in the streets of Cabul was the quickest way of restoring the prestige of Britain, General Pollock was quite prepared to risk the displeasure of his official superiors.

Curiously enough, General Nott, having also arranged to return to India *via* Cabul, evacuated Candahar, August 7th, 1842, leaving the city in the hands of Sufder Jung, son of Shah Soojah, the potentate we had foolishly forced on the Afghans. Determined not to be outdone by Pollock's men, the soldiers of General Nott rushed with such inconceivable fury on every fort in their road that the nerves of the defenders got into as bad a state as those of their countrymen who had fought Pollock's beauties, as they were called.

When Lord Ellenborough heard that Nott had reached Ghaznee, he evidently thought it time to identify himself with the avenging movement, so he ordered General Nott to bring away the gates of Sommauth adorning the tomb of Guzerat. A more monstrous exhibition of folly, a more shameless act of desecration, was never perpetrated. The gates were of no service to us, whilst to the Afghans they were beyond price.

Cowed as the Afghans were, the news that Nott had stolen the gates from the sacred tomb stirred into life the dying embers of their resistance.

Driven at last on to the plains below, they sustained such a crushing defeat that Nott was free to turn his attention to Shumshoodan Khan, who, after the destruction of Ghazni, had retired to a range of strong mountain posts at Nayden. Although these strongholds were not on the road to India, Nott made his way there, fighting a series of battles for their capture. The posts all destroyed and the Afghans dispersed, Nott now made for Cabul, to unite his forces to those of General Pollock.

The great object of the campaign had now to be achieved. Akbar had removed all his prisoners from Cabul on August 25th, compelling not only the officers and men, but even the ladies and children, to travel day and night without cessation. Their clothing was insufficient, and the food supplied was of the poorest quality; but of that Akbar thought nothing. His aim was to get them to Bamecan, on the other side of the snow-capped Hindu Kush.

Sir Richard Shakespeare and 600 horse were at once dispatched in pursuit of the fugitives, with instructions to use every means to overtake them. On the following day Sir Robert Sale and a strong force of infantry followed hot foot.

Akbar Khan had left word that the prisoners were to be murdered if we ever took them; but, fortunately for the rescuing party, Saleh Muhammed, their gaoler, was one of those Asiatics whose love of gold was even greater than his hatred of the English dog. He met the troopers twenty miles from the fort where they were confined, and spurned with disdain the first offer of Sir Richard Shakespeare; but when the bribe was increased to a lakh of rupees to give up the captives, he hesitated. Two days later he produced a letter from Akbar, ordering him to transfer the prisoners to the charge of Usbeg, chief of the Khulumans.

The pursuers, knowing nothing of the infamous character this worthy bore, made Saleh no further offer. This so staggered Akbar's agent that he returned to his prisoners, and told them who their gaoler was to be. They at once wrote to the pursuing party, who, being greatly alarmed, now played their last card. They produced a letter from General Pollock in which that officer promised if Saleh Muhammed would secure the release of the captives, to give him 20,000 rupees and a pension for life of 1,000 more. Saleh's cupidity was now thoroughly roused. "I know nothing of General Pollock," he cried, "but if you three gentlemen will swear by your Saviour to make good to me this offer, I will deliver my prisoners over to you."

The officers agreed; but Saleh, still mistrustful, again sought the captives, one of whom drew up in Persian an agreement, to which all the others affixed their signatures, promising that the sum named by General Pollock should be paid. This done, Akbar allowed himself to be arrested, the governor of the fort where the captives were was deposed, and the Union Jack hoisted.

The danger, however, was not yet passed, and this they knew. Confronting the surrounding tribesmen with the utmost *sang-froid*, the little party marched to Tophee Bala, and with breathless anxiety awaited the approach of their deliverers. At length a letter arrived from Sir R. Shakespeare, and the little band hurried on to meet him.

The company reached Cabul on September 21st, 1842. The entire British force turned out to receive them, and a salute of twenty-one guns was fired. It is said that the scene was one of the most pathetic ever witnessed. The ten rescued ladies fainted from excess of joy, and tears rolled unchecked down the cheeks of the strong men looking on. One of the captives, Captain Bygrave, was missing, but Akbar, who had personally detained this officer, sent him in a day or two after.

Smarting under the numerous defeats they had sustained, the Afghans were not likely to allow us to retreat without an endeavour at all events to recover the stolen gates. Hearing that Amun-Kha-Khan was collecting the scattered remnants of the Afghan Army, General Pollock dispatched General McCaskill to attack Istalif, the place of meeting. The vineyards of Istalif, a beautifully situated town, afforded admirable cover for the Afghan sharp-shooters. Very curiously the plan of the battle was conceived by Captain, afterwards Sir Henry Havelock, of Indian Mutiny fame.

Havelock's idea was to allow the enemy to collect in the vineyards in the belief that he would attack them there. The moment the Afghans saw the British columns marching stolidly in that direction, they hastened with great precipitation to the aid of their comrades. Before they could realise what was happening, our men were rushing the village of Ismillah, the key of the position. The enemy made one effort to retrieve their mistake, but they received such a severe handling that, being by now thoroughly demoralised, they took to flight.

The "Army of Retribution" having now amply avenged their past defeats, prepared to retire. This so alarmed Futteh Jung, son of Shah Soojah, that he at once vacated what he called the "seat perilous" and returned with us to India.

Next week: "The Crimean War."

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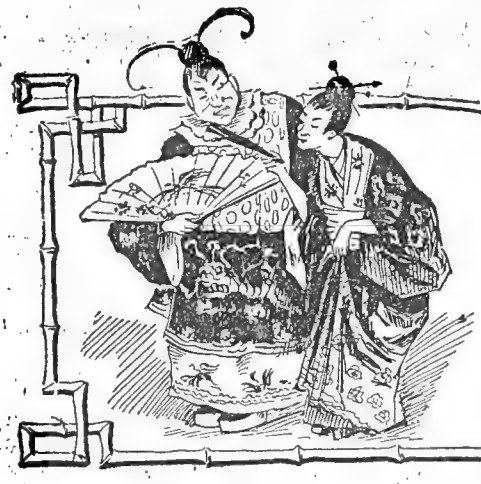


Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXVI.—HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW ARRIVES AND SPEAKS HER MIND.

On his way home the other evening, Mr. Bowser had his feet stepped on, his hat knocked off, and his ribs poked by umbrellas, and by the time he reached home he was ready for a row. To add fuel to his feelings, he found that his mother-in-law had arrived two hours before and was comfortably installed at the head of affairs, while Mrs. Bowser had gone to bed with a headache. Formal greetings had scarcely been exchanged when he said:

"What's all this twaddle about headache? When I left the house this morning, Mrs. Bowser was as chirpy as a cricket. Mighty funny that a headache should flop her into bed all at once."

"There's nothing funny about it," promptly replied the mother-in-law. "She had a nervous headache, and I told her to go to bed. She looks to me as if her nerves were all racked to pieces, and she ought to go home with me for a year."

"That's all nonsense. Her nerves are all right—as right as mine. She's probably been sloshing around in the rain and got her feet wet, and if so, she will get no pity from me."

"You are not asked or expected to pity her, sir, and if you want any dinner, you'd better eat it now. I found the cook very lazy and impudent and trying to run things to suit herself, and therefore I discharged her. I've managed to cook a little something myself, however."

"You—you discharged the cook at an hour's notice!" he exclaimed, with flushed face.

"I gave her seventeen minutes to get out. I'd like to see a cook or anyone else trying to walk over my daughter."

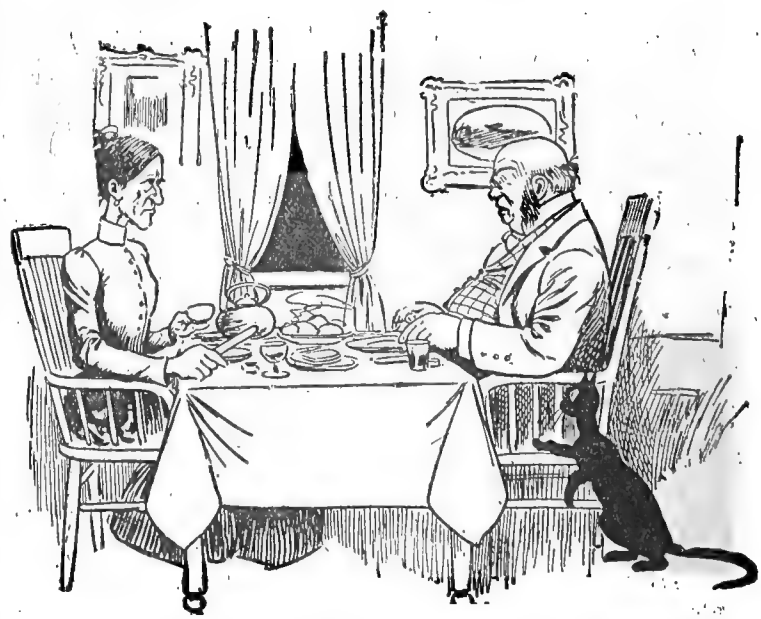
Mr. Bowser sat down to the table, with his gorge in his throat. The mother-in-law had thrown down the gauntlet, and he had picked it up.

"Here is the dinner," she exclaimed, as she brought it from the kitchen. "This is one of my Irish stews, and I know you'll like it."

"A stew for dinner!" he gasped, as his eyes began to roll.

"Certainly, and not much besides; but if it's good enough for me it's good enough for you. I've heard about your finding fault with your dinners, but you can either eat this or let it alone. When a man gets the idea that a house is run for his benefit only, it's time he was brought to book."

Mr. Bowser meant to jump up and pound on the table and declare that he was master of his own house, and wouldn't eat Irish stew for dinner if he starved to death; but, to his intense surprise, he not only clung to his chair, but found himself eating the stew. There was something in the icy glare of the woman that had a restraining influence on his impetuosity. The coffee was weak and the potatoes underdone, and he had opened his mouth to declare that he wouldn't ask a dog to sit down to such a meal, when the mother-in-law fastened her eyes on him and said:



There was something in the icy glare of the woman that had a restraining influence on his impetuosity.

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"You just keep quiet and be thankful for what you've got. I've known husbands to make a dinner on raw turnips!"

The pudding was flavoured with vanilla, and had Mrs. Bowser been there, Mr. Bowser would have made her heart ache for a month, but those icy eyes checked his outbreak, and even compelled him to eat rather generously. It was only when dinner was finished and they had returned to the sitting-room, that he determined to shake off the incubus, and assert his independence.

"I think I'll go over to the club for two or three hours this evening," he observed, as he toyed with the cat.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" replied the mother-in-law, as she turned on him. "You'll sit here and see if a doctor is wanted, or if there are any errands to be done. The idea of your loafing around a club when your wife is almost too sick to speak! If you had a soft corn on your toe, the whole house would have to hover over you."

Mr. Bowser choked and strangled in his indignation, and the cat grinned and said to herself that things would break loose pretty soon.

"And I've heard," continued the woman, as her teeth clicked together, "that you play cards at the club, and sometimes lose as much as two or three pounds of an evening. I wish you were my husband for about an hour! You'd never play cards more than once."

"Did you come here to insult and abuse me?" demanded Mr. Bowser, with a flash of independence.

"I came out here to put things right, and I shall do it," she sternly replied.

Then followed a powerful silence, broken at last by his going down to the cellar to nail a board on the coal-bin. He had just started to drive a nail, when the mother-in-law appeared on the stairs, and said:

"Drop that hammer like a hot potato! Don't you know that every blow goes through your poor wife's head with a bang? You've got about as much heart in you as a rhinoceros."

"Woman, how dare you talk to me like that!" he shouted as his face grew as white as flour.

"Don't call me 'woman' and yell out that way," she replied. "No bully can frighten me. If you want something to do, go up and sit with your wife while I wash up the dishes."

Mr. Bowser sulked for a few minutes and then walked upstairs. Finding Mrs. Bowser asleep, he thought it would be a good thing to overhaul his wardrobe. He had scarcely pulled out one of the drawers when he discovered a sock with a hole in the heel. Indignation overcame him on the instant, and he flourished the sock on high and exclaimed:

"So this is the way my house is run, is it! Here's a sock that I bought new two weeks ago and never had on my foot, and yet someone has worn a hole in the heel!"

"Is—is it you?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she woke up.

"Yes; it is me, and what about this sock? Look at it! Behold this specimen of wifely interest in her husband's welfare! Is it any wonder——"

The mother-in-law appeared at that moment, and, pointing to the stairs, she said:

"You and your holey sock get out o' this as fast as you can!"

Mr. Bowser went. Something in her he feared—some element of mastery; but as they returned to the sitting-room he shook off the feeling, and hoarsely whispered;

"There is a train at 10 o'clock in the morning! you can go by that!"

"If I do, it'll be as a corpse!" she grimly replied. "Sit down there! Now, then, I want to tell you a few things. You are a bullying husband, and it would do you good to be hit across the neck with a crowbar. You think you know a lot, and you are bound to have your way with everybody. No other woman in this world, except your wife, would live with you two hours, and she's a fool for doing it. You never come home except to kick about something, and if I was your wife, I'd scald you. You talk about waste and extravagance, and yet you'd buy sand for sugar if left alone. You browbeat and roar and bellow, but in a week I'll have you as humble as a cat. It's all in the right woman getting hold of you."

"And you'll stay a week," groaned Mr. Bowser.

"Four of them!" she replied. "And I'll work a remarkable change in you, or know the reason why. It won't do you a mite of good to roll your eyes, gnash your teeth, and crack your toes. Don't go upstairs again till bedtime, and if there's any more rows over holey socks, you'll go bare-foot in your shoes the rest of the winter!"

She went to the kitchen to finish the dishes, and the cat crept over to Mr. Bowser and rubbed against his leg and purred in sympathy. The room seemed to stifle him, and he got up and walked softly down the hall and out on the step, followed by the cat, and they sat down side by side on the step and gazed into vacancy. A tramp halted at the gate and asked for a penny to get victuals for his vitals, but Mr. Bowser and the cat gazed on—gazed at vacancy, and realised that the end of the world was close at hand.

M. Quad.

"A KEEPER OF SECRETS."

Splendid series of complete stories begins next week.

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A MODEL ROMANCE.

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "let me show you a model."

"Oh, Mr. Ormond, I am so tired of this position. I wish you could let me have a rest. Do—there's a good fellow—please."

"Wait just five minutes, Polly, till I've done this bit of your head. Don't move—just one minute more. I'm getting it right now, and then we'll knock off for a bit."

The request was the request of a model; the answer was the answer of a painter. The model reclined, in a half-kneeling attitude, apparently at the foot of a cross. Her clasped hands were uplifted; her eyes were upraised pathetically; her long hair streamed down, flowingly, over neck and shoulders; a loose white sort of shirt clothed her to the waist; below was a reddish brown skirt, skilfully disposed as "drapery," in artful folds. The whole attitude and expression represented—and represented well—imploring agony combined with tender despair. The bare arms were beautifully disposed, the eyes gleamed with a sublime splendour.

The painter—my friend Frank Ormond, A.R.A.— is working with quiet excitement at his easel. His figure is tall; he wears the velvet coat of his craft; he—but why describe him? Everybody knows Frank Ormond. Let that pass.

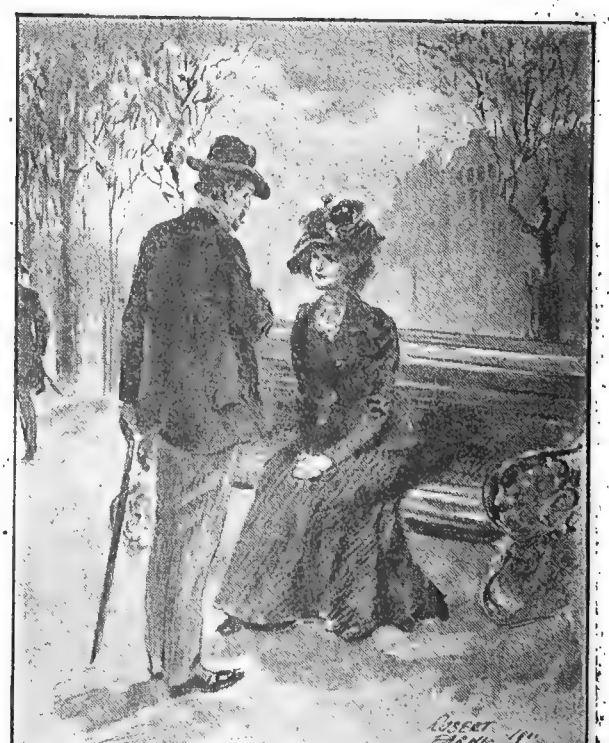
And now, reader, while painter and model (the attitude was a trying one) have "knocked off" work for a little rest, while he lights a pipe, and she, yawningly, stretches her stiff and weary limbs, let us look round us at the delicious litter of a painter's studio.

The house is old, and dates, probably, from Queen Anne's days. It has, no doubt, been the habitation of nobles of that period. You cannot see much of the walls, but look at the doors, at the painted ceiling, at the splendid marble mantelpiece. Look at the deep window-places and tall, thick-sashed windows. It is a house which Hogarth might have used for the residence of Lord Squanderfield.

The studio is a large three-windowed room, cold and bare of aspect. The backs of canvases framed with deal lie about like bits of scenes out of use, and suggest somewhat the *coulisses* of a theatre. A lay figure with a wooden fixedness of aspect, its head reminding one of a ship's figure-head, sits in a renaissance chair, and wears a thirteenth century costume. This figure forms the principal still-life object in the room. In one corner reposes the major part of an old suit of armour, the dull and dinted breastplate surmounted, in a rather drunken way, by a rust-red helmet. A bell-hilted rapier, *temp.* Elizabeth, which, says Frank, might have belonged to Raleigh, leans against the wall, and near it is a small sword which suggests the tea-cup times of Anne, the flowing wig and stiff skirts, the figure of Addison, or the brawling Mohocks who stopped Swift's chair.

From the open door of a richly carved dark *armoire* depends a Japanese robe. Plaster casts of feet and hands, busts, masks, and a torso, with the muscles strongly accented by dust, are sprinkled about, and contrast chalkily with the colour of the hangings, bits of silk dresses, and a remnant of tapestry. Two old foils, one broken, and both grievously damaged, lie across the arms of a magnificent antique chair, which has a seat of faded crimson velvet, on which rest a Spanish mandolin and one boxing glove; while a strip of yellow Chinese silk has slipped down on to the floor. A stuffed monkey, with a perennially diabolical smile upon a swollen visage, balances uneasily upon legs with a padded look about them, while a stuffed owl stares glassily in sullen gravity.

The bust of one Roman emperor is crowned with a



He spoke to her, and proposed that she should come and sit to him.

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Vandyke hat, and a white petticoat is supported by two Velasquez boar-spears. A very handsome oak table, with massive legs, is covered with Venetian glasses and Flemish bottles, with "pots" of various sorts, comprising Gris de Flandres, Satsuma jars, and the blue lange Lizen, or six-mark Japanese ware, while an exquisite little Japanese cabinet is crested by a handful of peacock's feathers.

Sketches in charcoal and in oils, copies of world-renowned pictures, studies, unfinished paintings, are strewn about in picturesque and grotesque confusion; and, finally, at one end of the room, with the best light falling full upon it, stands the guillotine-like easel on which rests *the* picture of the hour, the canvas which absorbs all Frank Ormond's thoughts and is freighted with all his ambition, the picture upon which he is now working.

And so the happy painter works from year to year—labour, completion, weariness, fruition, recommencement. His whole work and hope are concentrated, for the time, upon the picture with which he remains face to face for many lonely months.

It is finished at last, finished just when it must be completed in order to be sent in to the Acadamy; and then the reaction of lassitude after long tension begins. His work has gone out from him; the painter feels weary of the picture over which he has felt so many fluctuations of depression and delight. It has absorbed so much of himself that he cannot judge it truly; he alternates between confidence and despondency; he sighs half with regret half in relief, as his distracting darling is carried forth from his doors. Then he relaxes the long strain of anxious labour; he amuses himself, and half forgets his art; he works but little, if at all.

She shook hands cheerily, and then shut the studio door for the last time.

The picture gets well hung; then comes the private view, with the critics; then the public crowding about the shining rows in the splendid gallery; then follow the favourable notice, the praise of friends, the sneer of "brother" rivals; then all this passes away, until, after due relaxation, the painter recommences with renewed ardour his work so beautiful and loved.

A painter, by the way, has one great advantage over an author—he is sure of his spectators, of his public. If his work be hung in a good exhibition it is sure to be seen by all those whom the painter would wish to see it. An author has to go to his readers; but his spectators always come to a painter.

Meanwhile Frank, twisting his moustache as he gazes on his picture, and now and then throwing in a deft and rapid touch of the brush, is waiting until his model shall have rested in order to go on.

"Bother the skirt!" cries that young person, who, with a view to warming herself, has been dancing about the studio trying a burlesque pas which she had seen on the previous evening at the theatre. "There, Mr. Ormond, I'm rested now. On we go again."

The little model interested me, both in her individualism and as a member of a class which furnishes to the artist the materialism of the romantic. I tried to learn something of her history, but I succeeded only sketchily and in a piecemeal manner.

Her name was Polly Brown. She was distinctly pretty and piquante. She possessed, among her various merits as a model, very long and beautiful brown hair, which she knew how to dishevel and tumble down far below her waist in a flow of romantic distress.

Her eyes, brown also, were large and full of soft fire; and the little monkey had a trick of rendering them plaintive and pathetic in expression, so that she was particularly valuable as a model for young heroines in distress, virgin martyrs, betrayed beauties, and the like. Her complexion was that of a light brunette; had she lived more in the country her cheeks would, it is probable, have shown a little flush of tender red through the pale, soft olive of her tient. She had a nice little nose; the mouth was good, though perhaps a little large, but she knew how to purse it up, and to draw the corners down so as partially to conceal this little defect.

The shape of the little half-arch, half-tender face was a fine oval, and the head was remarkably well set on. She was good in profile, but better as a three-quarter face with up-turned eyes. Her hands and feet were small, and the figure, though a trifle petite, was round and well shaped. Her manner was always merry, but never boisterous, and the girl had innate tact and taste.

"Yes," observed Frank critically, "she is a first-rate model in her line. It is only when you see a good deal of her that you detect the least little *soupçon* of vulgarity, which comes no doubt from her mother. Do you know I rather like that little suspicion of plebeianism; it shows that her base touches the people. She is good, you know, for historical heroines. She is fit, in fact, for what actors call the juvenile tragedy line of business. Do you remember my Olivia in the Vicar of Wakefield? Well, she sat, and did splendidly, for that. She's always punctual and pleasant to deal with; she's lively and

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frisky but never rude, and she's really a good little girl. Out of all the models I know, she's about the best. I like little Polly; if you want to please her you've only got to send her to the play."

The little model had considerable imitative and dramatic talent, and readily picked up the trick of her trade. She quickly caught a painter's idea, and produced the expression, or caught the attitude which his purpose required. She had a little feminine voice, almost as exquisitely dainty as Marie Wilton's, and had conquered that difficulty, so great to one of her class, of a good pronunciation.

Polly's mother was housekeeper in a set of chambers. She had been on the stage in her youth, and retained a strong passion for the theatre. Of her father I could learn nothing.

Polly, herself, in her early girlhood, had been theatrical. She danced as a fairy in pantomimes, and formed one of a child group of peasants, or what not, as required by the ballet master, but to her disappointment she never could obtain a "speaking part." One winter a severe illness threw her out of her usual employment.

When she recovered she found no opening in the theatre, and she was for a short time driven to resort to sewing. She was then engaged in the extensive and prosperous outfitting establishment of Messrs. Abednego and Menchisadek; but this miserably paid drudgery did not long suit Miss Polly. She was unhappy, and grew desperate, or rather determined.

Sanguine in her youthful hopefulness, she suddenly discharged herself, and trusted to the chapter of accidents. One day, when very poor, Polly strolled into the Park.

Sitting down upon a bench, still and quiet as an Arctic winter night, she thought and thought what she could do to earn her living.

It was early spring; the painters were hard at work for the Academy, and good models were scarce. Frank Ormond happened to be passing by. He wanted a girl-model, and his painter's eye was struck by little Polly's face and figure. He spoke to her, and proposed that she should come and sit to him. Polly consented, and went the next morning to his studio. She had found a new trade, which she rather liked, and which, as she gradually acquired a connection among painters, paid her moderately well.

She grew attached to the free and easy Bohemian ways of the studio, and was soon launched as a well-known and popular "model," in which capacity, while sitting for Joan of Arc, I first made her acquaintance.

Polly, by the way, always had a superstition about the Park, and believed that it was a place which "brought her good luck."

"I first met you, Mr. Ormond, in the Park," she used at times to say, "and I am sure that some day some great good fortune will happen to me in that dear old Park. I often sit upon that bench where you first saw me. Ah, I was badly off then!"

The life of a model is not without perils and temptations to a young girl; but Polly trod safely her rather dangerous path with a firm, light step. Her innocence was not ignorance; for she saw and heard a great deal, and understood all that she saw or heard.

Without protectors or advisers, lonely but self-reliant, the girl walked along the edge of unfenced precipices circumspectly and shrewdly. She was ardent, and perhaps ambitious, but had a certain integrity of will and quiet force of character which held her upright. Very unconsciously, the little lowly thing was a sort of worldly heroine.

Natural character and the influence of the circumstances which surrounded and moulded it, produced some rather complex contradictions and problems in our model. Seen in some aspects, you would have pronounced her to be a little good-for-nothing; merry and pleasant, indeed, but worthless. Yet you would have judged her wrongly had you based an opinion upon the superficial trivialities which she turned outside.

She never made any pretence of goodness; she rather took pains to show her worst side, to appear much worse than she really was. She had naturally a light side to her character, and she emphasized her levity in all that she showed of herself to others.

Nor was she, at times, wholly free from passing thrills

"By Jove!" cried Frank, "but women are wonderful creatures."

of temptation; but, like the needle of the compass, which, though it vibrates tremulously yet ultimately points always rightly, she gravitated back infallibly to good.

A creature by no means too bright or good for human nature's daily food, there was in her that "mystic sense of right" which so stirred the enthusiasm of the German philosopher. Exposed to so much danger, sustained by so little help against evil, some unseen power kept this girl always really pure and good.

She had, no doubt, a *tendresse* for Frank Ormond, but then her shrewd practical sense showed her that there was, as she termed it, "no use" in indulging such a feeling; and, taught by the hard lessons of her life, she had learned to repress, to restrain, and to forego.

One morning, when Frank was just finishing his

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well-known picture of the execution of Lady Jane Grey, in which Polly, of course, "sat" for the victim Queen, the young lady, at the conclusion of the sitting, said very quietly:

"You won't want me any more, Mr. Ormond. You've finished that picture, head and all, now. I'm glad of it; because I shouldn't be able to come to you again."

"Not come again, Polly—why not? I suppose you are very full of engagements just now; but you mustn't throw me over. I shall want you next week for my 'Dorothea.'"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ormond, but I shan't ever be able to come again."

"Not be able to come again—what the deuce do you mean, Polly?" asked Frank rather pettishly, as he relieved the headsman with a deft touch. "I suppose you're getting too rich?—no, it can't be that. You must come. There's no model at all like you for some of my work. Ah, I see! you've been spooning with some fellow; or in trouble, eh, Miss Poll?"

"No," replied the young lady with demure dignity, "no trouble, thank you, Mr. Frank. The fact is—I can't come because—because I'm going to be married."

"Married—whew!" cried the painter, facing round from the easel and taking his pipe out of his mouth. "Married, Polly! I never heard about that—who is it? What sort of fellow? A good one, I hope, for your sake."

"Never mind, Mr. Frank," responded Miss Polly composedly. "Perhaps you'll know some day, but not now. Thank you for all your kindness, Mr. Ormond. You've always been very kind to me, and I—I like you very much. Yes; I'm doing very well, thank you. He is a good fellow—I like him and I mean that we shall be very happy. But when I am married I can't sit again any more, if you please."

Frank Ormond growled discontentedly. He did not like losing his model, and he felt a vague jealousy of the unknown. There was a sneer in his tone as he said:

"I suppose, Polly, you have caught some old fool, who is taken with a pretty face, and your union will be about as incongruous as woodbine twining round a wooden leg."

"Think what you like, Mr. Ormond," said little Polly calmly. "I know what you do think; but never mind that. I shall tell you just nothing about it. I only came to-day" (Polly was tying on her bonnet) "because I knew you wanted me to finish your 'Lady Jane Grey.' That's done now, and I must say good-bye. I'm very grateful to you, Frank, I am, indeed, for all your kindness. I'm sorry to have to give up coming to the studio—I liked the life—but it's all over now. Thank you—six shillings; yes, that's right. My career as a model is ended. Once more—good-bye, Mr. Frank."

She shook hands cheerily, and then shut the studio door for the last time.

The strange thing was, that the little witch had made a good marriage. She had won the affections of a good man, of position and property.

The reticent little monkey never told anyone about her courtship, or the progress of it; but once, some time after, she betrayed herself so far as smilingly to tell Frank, when she met him in society, that the whole thing began "in the Park, in that dear old Park; on the old bench—you know"; and this was the alpha and omega of her confession.

Many studios were for a time corroded by curiosity; but time had to wear this feeling away without other artificial solacement. Some painters expressed anger at losing their little model; others expressed perplexity at her rise in life; but no one could drop a hint about her fair fame, and, as she had been generally liked, many good wishes accompanied her change of position.

Like that Mattie, sometime a "near cousin o' the Laird of Limmerfield's," and who, when elevated to the position of Mrs. Bailie Nicol Jarvie, "behaved excellently in her exaltation," little Polly made a model wife. She had all a woman's pliability, adaptability, and tact; and she soon picked up the style and manners necessary to her new position.

She was naturally graceful, and she had a little touch of woman's pride; pride in herself, and pride for her husband. She wished to make her husband happy, and was determined that he should not have to blush for his choice. She set to work, too, to educate herself in her way.

Having a strong motive to impel her, and great natural quickness, she soon succeeded in acquiring a respectable veneer of culture; and Frank Ormond, who meets her from time to time, told me that she had developed and improved in an altogether surprising manner. I believe that she succeeded, without apparent effort, in educing from Mr. Frank the respect due to her new position, rather than the familiarity likely to arise from their old relations, and yet she was quite frank, and kind, and natural, with him.

"By Jove!" cried Frank, "when I took her down to dinner the other day at the Howards', I could hardly believe that the self-possessed, lady-like woman by whom I was sitting had ever been the little monkey that used so often to dance burlesque dances about my studio! But women are wonderful creatures, sir. Their knowledge of the world beats ours. If they were only a good actresses on the stage as they are off it, the dramatic art would be in a fine way."

Success ripens and improves some natures; and little Polly was decidedly improved by good fortune. She was always pretty, but as I saw her the other day in the Park (looking out, probably not without thoughts, for a certain bench), reclining easily in her carriage, she appeared positively elegant and *distinguée*. She was particularly well-dressed, and had a piquante touch of *grande dame* in her manner.

Does anyone who has ever really belonged to Bohemia pass out of it into Philistia, or even into higher regions, without an occasional retrospect of regret, and a backward glance, coupled with a sigh?

Did our Polly, lolling upon her easy carriage cushions, ever look back with a little tinge of sadness to the days in which she used to trudge on foot, through mud and rain, to the stage-door, or to the painter's studio? What does she think when she visits the Royal Academy? How does she feel when she goes to the theatre?

Does she ever speculate upon the new model (the golden-haired one) who now sits to Frank Ormond?

Does she, as she gazes upon the "Amaranthine Bowers of Boundless Joy," recall the feelings of the figurantes who, clothed in sheeny tinsel, float ethereally upon iron supports in the ideal atmosphere of blue and red lights?

I do not know; I have no hint which would enable me to solve the problem; but I am assured that she is gratefully happy in her married life; and that, as a wife, she is still a *model*.

H. Schutz-Wilson.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Keepers of the People," by Edgar Jepson, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, February 25th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mr. W. BARROW, of 16 St. John's Terrace, Lewes.

Ideal and Real.

SMITHE was about to pop the momentous question to the girl of his choice, and was trying to decide how he should do it.

First, he thought of the knightly proposal in the style of the Middle Ages.

"By my halidame, fair maid, say thou wilt be mine, and the holy friar shall unite us ere another sun gilds the turrets of yonder castle?"

Then he considered the theatrical style:

"I have long loved you in secret, g-ur-r-l, and, though I am not rich, I can offer you the true and unselfish devotion of me whole ha-a-r-r-t!"

He thought, perhaps, the easy conversational style might do:

"Well, Alicia—I may call you 'Alicia,' mayn't I?—everyone thinks we are going to be married. Suppose we do get married, just to please 'em, you know?"

But, when the critical time came, he did it thus:

"Er—Miss Alicia—er—excuse the familiarity, but—er—er—will you—er—oh, by Jove!"

And then she came to the rescue, and said:

"That'll do, Billy, dear boy; it's all serene, and I know the old folk will be pleased." W. B.

The Left was Right.

"WEEL, John, how are you to-day?" said a Scotch minister to one of his parishioners on meeting him on the road.

"Gey weel, sir; gey weel," responded John cautiously, "gin it wa sna for the rheumatis' in my richt leg."

"Ah, weel, John, be thankful, for there is no mistake you are getting old, like the rest of us, and old age, you know, doesn't come alone."

"Auld age, sir!" returned John; "I won'er tae hear ye. Auld age has naething tae dae wi't. Here's my ither leg just as auld, an' it's quite soond and soople yet." C. R. F.

War and Peace.

A WELL-KNOWN dramatist, calling a friend's attention to the thinness of the house at one of his own plays, added that he supposed it was "owing to the war."

"No," replied the latter, "it is owing to the piece." T. J. W.

A Good Brand.

ONE morning during the siege of Ladysmith, the Boers on the heights commanding the town heliographed the following message to the men of the Naval Brigade:

"Good-morning, shipmates, got any bacca?"

To which the tars promptly signalled back:

"We've got plenty of Lambton's Navy Cut in prime condition, come down and get a pipeful."

But the Boers weren't having any. H. E. L.

Zeal Rewarded.

A POLICEMAN in a country village, whose "cases" were rare, one day came across his landlord in an incapable state. The chance was too good to be missed and the landlord was summoned and fined to the amount of fourteen shillings and sixpence.

The fine was paid, but the policeman's feelings can be better imagined than described, when, on reaching home, he found his rent had been raised sixpence per week, and so it continued for twenty-nine weeks, when the landlord coolly informed him that "he had paid the fine and could have his house at the former rent."

E. L.

Satisfied.

AT a rifle range a clerical gentleman rode up, and, addressing the sergeant in charge, complained that bullets had fallen into his garden, in a village a mile or so in the rear of the butts. The "old soldier," with a wink to his comrades, replied:

"I'll see that it doesn't happen again, sir; I'll put a man on the top of the hill with special orders to stop the bullets from going over."

"Oh, thank you, very much!" responded the ecclesiastic with a satisfied smile, and rode off with the air of a man relieved of a mighty anxiety.

H. R.

Through the Telephone.

"ARE you there?"

"Yes."

"Who are you, please?"

"Watt."

"What is your name, please?"

"Watt's my name."

"Yes; what is your name?"

"I say my name is Watt."

"Oh, well, I'm coming to see you this afternoon."

"All right. Are you Jones?"

"No; I'm Knott."

"Who are you, then, please?"

"I'm Knott."

"Will you tell me your name, please?"

"Will Knott."

"Why won't you?"

"I say my name is William Knott."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"Then you'll be in this afternoon if I come round, Watt?"

"Certainly, Knott."

They were cut off by the exchange, and Knott wants to know if Watt will be in or not.

T. A. F.

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What Struck Him Most.

An Irish soldier, lately returned from Africa, and who was at the Battle of Spion Kop, had been relating his experiences at the engagement. After enlarging on his many hairbreadth escapes to his listeners, one of them asked him:

"Now, all throughout the desperate fighting, will you please tell us what struck you most forcibly when you came to think it over?"

"I can truly say, sor, that what sthruck me most forcibly was the bullets that missed me."

C. D.

His Distinguishing Mark.

A boy employed by an itinerant showman—who was noted for his bullying—had a rough time of it, and there was no love lost between them.

One day while busily employed scrubbing a performing dog belonging to the show, he was accosted by a stranger, who inquired where his master was.

"Oh," said the boy, "he's just gone into the monkey's cage—and—I say!" he shouted, as the man was walking off in the direction indicated, "you'll know him, 'cause he's got white whiskers!"

A. A. L.

Hint Not Taken.

A certain farmer in the Midlands dispatched his Irish servant with a note to his neighbour.

"Did you take the note, and did you see Mr. Thompson, Pat?"

"Yes, sor."

"And how was he?"

"Why, he looked pretty well; but shure he's very bloind."

"Blind? What do you mean?"

"Why, while I wur in the room he axed me where moi hat were, and sure it was entirely on my head, and myself straight in front of him all the whoile."

F. W.

"Good Gracious!"

A young soldier had gone to the theatre with a friend.

The play dragged, and he fell asleep. An hour later he was awakened by the voice of an actor, saying:

"We have been here five days!"

The infantryman got up in a fright, and said to his friend:

"Good gracious! and I had only leave to stop out till midnight!"

W. T.

It Brayed.

The other evening an individual of the know-everything type was airing his infinite knowledge in the presence of a number of rustics in the village inn.

Presently the subject turned upon superstitions, and after a lengthy discourse upon the various popular beliefs, such as spilling the salt, breaking up looking-glasses, etc., which was alleged to bring bad luck, our would-be oracle said:

"Again, gentlemen, when a donkey brays it is a sure sign of rain."

"Then, for goodness' sake, shut yer darned mouth," roared a bluff old farmer, "for I haven't got my crops in yet!"

W. L.

Tried to Please.

"Good gracious, Maria, another millinery bill? Why on earth you want so many new things I can't understand. Look at me. I have had nothing new on for the last three months."

"But men are different to women, and besides, you surely would not like your wife to look a fright before other people?"

"Certainly not, but at the same time you might get something tasty and pretty. It seems to me that the women of the present day exert themselves with more industry than sense in their efforts to be beautiful. Their insane efforts are simply outlandish."

"But one must follow the fashion; you know that, Will."

"Nonsense. Give me taste first. Why, Maria, you do not look nearly so pretty as you did when I first married you fifteen years ago."

"Oh, that's because I've grown older."

"Oh, no, it isn't that. I liked you in the simple dress of days gone by. You never look so pretty as you did then."

"Well, I will do my best to please."

The husband sat down with his paper whilst his wife bustled off to her boudoir to dress for a drive.

Shortly afterwards the voice of the latter was heard saying: "Are you ready, dear?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the husband as he looked up from his paper. "What in the name of goodness have you been doing? Don't you know we're going out driving?"

She wore a very small hat, a large chignon, and strangely-proportioned masses of millinery, for which his vocabulary could find no phrase. A diminutive parasol completed the absurdity.

"I am only trying to please you, dear," she quietly replied.

"To please me?"

"Yes," was the reply. "It's the way I dressed fifteen years ago when we were married!"

P. B.

4D. 4D.

Above is a reduced facsimile of the Cover and Poster.

4D. 4D.

Ready Friday Next, Feb. 22nd.

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One Week at Ardlene.

ARDLENE was a picturesque little village, nestled in the bosom of a lovely valley, upon the border-line between Monmouthshire and the Principality.

Surrounded, especially on the Welsh side, by hills, or rather mountains, and approachable only by a circuitous, and fairly dangerous road, leading from the nearest railway station, thirteen miles away, it was as sequestered and peaceful a spot as the heart, even of the most confirmed recluse, could desire.

There were not more than two dozen buildings in the place, inclusive of the church and school-house, the latter a small barn-like structure, with a little cottage attached.

Here, for nearly two years, had lived Alice Maylin, the schoolmistress and organist, with a child, a fine boy of six, known as Mervyn Stapleton, and supposed by the neighbourhood to be the delicate offspring of an old friend, consigned to her care.

Alice had been recommended to the vicar by a lady, to whose daughters she had formerly acted as governess. This lady, a personal and old friend of the Earl of Grassmere, a local magnate, had been greatly surprised at receiving from Alice Maylin a sudden notice to leave her charge, without the assignment of any reason whatever.

It was singular, too, that her departure was coincident with that of Viscount Harbleton, Lord Grassmere's eldest son, from Cardew Castle the family seat. The young nobleman left ostensibly for the Continent, while Alice disappeared altogether out of ken and knowledge.

When the Viscount returned, which he did in about twelve months' time, he had the usual "travellers' tales" wherewith to regale the dinner-table and the smoke-room. Some there were who thought that they could detect a false ring about them, for the eldest son of the house had a somewhat unenviable reputation for "long-bow" practice.

He was unpopular, too, both in and outside his family, the servants detesting him, while taking his tips. He had a distinct liking for "low life," so that with a certain class he was known as a "fine fellow," a "generous gentleman," and so on. Extravagant, vain, and some said vicious, he was the plague of his father's life, by reason of his debts, and disregard of family dignity and tradition.

All this occurred about seven years before the period of the present relation. The Viscount was now out in South Africa with his regiment; Alice Maylin, in her little restful nook at Ardlene, many miles from Cardew, and former associations.

There remained nearly five years of the girl's life unaccounted for, but she was silent concerning it, and all in her little retreat among the border hills respected her reserve.

No one in Ardlene questioned her claim to be other than she professed, more especially as she was a favourite with both young and old, rich and poor.

To sharp eyes it sometimes seemed that she had a mental trouble, but it was also noticed that when more than ordinarily depressed she would seek the old oak-panelled organ-loft across the road and there with soft impromptu, lay the spirit that oppressed her.

It was on one of these occasions that two gentlemen, with tourist knapsacks, and other and sundry signs, which marked them as a pair of indefatigable pedestrians, sat, lazily comfortable, upon a half-sunken altar tomb in the little churchyard, listening to the dreamy melody that floated out at open door and window upon the hot summer air.

"Say, Brent, that's a woman playing, I'll lay my life," said the elder of the two, a fair-featured, tallish man, with a pleasant smile, and apparently about thirty years of age, "what she is playing is better than a hymn, and quite as holy, if not more so."

"Yes," replied the other, "it's evidently a woman, and —a pretty one, I should say, if musical expression, and its impression upon the hearer mean anything at all."

"Nonsense! and yet, you may be right, for there's a good deal, I believe, in the influence of sweet sounds."

"Savage breast—charms—and all the rest of it. Oh! there's something in it, no doubt. Hullo! where are you off to George?"

The other had risen from the stone, and moved slowly towards the door of the church.

Hesitating a moment he entered.

The interior was dark to anyone coming in out of the bright sunlight, and for a short while he could distinguish nothing plainly.

Presently, almost immediately, indeed, the music ceased, and he saw a slight figure, with dark hair and eyes coming towards him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I hope I have not disturbed you?"

"Oh, no!" she answered him, "I have been here too long; come Mervyn!"

The boy, who had lingered behind to exchange certain

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mysterious confidences with the organ-blower, came running up to her.

"Did you say Mervyn? Curious! That is an uncommon name, rather, isn't it? It is an hereditary one in my family."

"Indeed!" she said politely, but a little coldly, perhaps, for she was quite alive to the fact that the conversation was getting a trifle confidential as between strangers.

"Yes," he continued, affecting not to notice her manner, "our eldest sons are always named Mervyn. What a fine little chap!"

They had by this time strolled down the miniature aisle, and were standing in the porch. He could see that his travelling companion had vanished, probably in the direction of the inn.

"This is a quiet, beautiful little place," he ventured, seeing that she appeared disinclined to initiate conversation. "I and a friend are but passing through it on our way to Chester, but I think a week among these hills would do me good, and render me more fit to encounter the trials of London and the 'season.'"

This was a proposition Alice could not well assent to or appear to encourage. She merely inclined her head courteously, and made as if to cross the road to her own home.

The lad at her side here looked inquisitively up at the stranger, for strangers were rare in Ardlene.

George Stapleton-Cardew was by no means a fatalist, and certainly not superstitious, but he could not repress an exclamation of surprised interest.

"I fear," he said, "you will think me rude and intrusive, but will you tell me this little fellow's surname?"

"Stapleton," answered Alice, quietly, "and now we must leave you, for school is assembling."

With another inclination of the head, she, and the child, who turned his head more than once to look back at him, were gone.

He stood for some minutes, leaning against the porch front.

"Mervyn Stapleton! It can't surely, and yet must be chance. The boy's cast of feature is Cardew all over. He's the image, too, of Harbleton. But there, it's absurd! It can't be! Harbleton's a queer stick, I own, but I fancy even he would draw the line at matrimonial underhandedness. Well, I'll stop here, and try to fathom the mystery. Stop here a week at least. Brent may do as he chooses. If he leaves me here alone, so much the better."

On his way to the inn he cogitated still further with himself, this time Alice being the prevailing thought.

"A sweet girl that; and—a lady. Evidently the schoolmistress. How did she come to take that on, I wonder? Yes, I'll stay."

He found his friend, Brent, as he expected, at the inn, hungry, impatient, and curious; found him also to be quite disinclined to a prolonged stay at the primitive little spot.

"I'd be dead in twenty-four hours, George let alone a week. No, my boy, I'll get on to Chester to-morrow morning; though I do think it a bit shabby of you to desert your chum on the last "lap."

He was as good as his word, and was up and away while the day was young.

Much may be done in a week, and assuredly George made good use of the time.

Alice could not well escape meeting him within such narrow limits, and so it was that ere long she had to confess to herself to a decided liking for him. He was one of those reliable and strong natures which invariably attract women, (women worthy of the name that is). She was conscious long before the week was out that he loved her, while she began to feel that she could love h m, if only——

Ay! the "if" was large and ugly.

One evening after dinner he went out across the fields towards a fir wood that covered the lower slope of the hillside.

Half way he met her.

"Don't go home yet," he said, with just a suspicion of entreaty in his voi e. "I want to say something to you."

"Yes!" she answered, in that inartificial, simply-direct way that he so admired in her.

"Shall we go through the wood?" he asked.

"No, it seems freer in the fields. Besides it is getting late, and I must not wander too far from home."

"Miss Maylin! the fact, perhaps, may not interest you greatly, but I leave here to-morrow evening."

"I am sorry—I mean——"

"You are sorry, that is good to hear. Miss Maylin, Alice! I will not insult you by a long story, or fine language. What do you imagine my week here has taught me?"

"I cannot say."

"There you are wrong, and untrue to yourself. You know, you must know that this week has been a revelation to me, that during it, I have learned to love you. That——"

"Mr. Cardew, you are right; I am, and have been wrong. Wrong in listening to you, wrong in leading you to believe that which is altogether untrue."

"Impossible! I do not understand. My meaning was other than your interpretation of it. You would tell me, maybe, of obstacles, hindrances; is that so?"

"Yes, and I am sorry."

"What are they?"

"Is this not cruel of you? I should not have allowed you to say or to imply even so much had I not cared—a little—I mean——"

"That is enough!" he interrupted her masterfully. "Tell me all about it, and let me be the judge."

Then she told him.

How that seven years before, when, as a governess she lived in the neighbourhood of Cardew Castle, she met with, was wooed and won by Mervyn, Lord Harbleton.

Immediately after their private marriage, she threw up her engagement, and they left for a small house in the Upper Thames Valley.

For a time all went well. Then her husband developed habits of intemperance and savage irritability, which, on a certain occasion, soon after the birth of their son, broke out into open brutality.

He struck her, leaving a mark upon her forehead, (she raised her hair and showed it him) which she would carry to her grave.

George here stooped down and reverently kissed the spot; and she did not attempt to repel him.

All love for her husband, (for she had loved him) died upon the day that he lifted his hand to her. Disillusioned, desperate almost, she wrote him a letter during one of his many absenses from her, announcing her departure with her child.

From that hour she had never seen him, but George

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would of course now see how absolutely impossible was the realisation of his hopes.

One thing, and one only had weighed upon her mind, and continued to trouble her, her boy's future. By right he was next in succession to his unworthy father, and yet she dreaded the ordeal which must naturally follow upon a prosecution of his claim.

"Alice!" said George, "you must let me have the lad, that I may show him to his grandfather. I will so plead his cause that the Earl, who is a just man, must recognise his right to be considered a son of the house, as he must also render you that justice denied you by my cousin. Tell me, why is the boy named Stapleton only?"

"Because on our marriage, my husband, persuading me that to be wedded in the name of Cardew would jeopardise his position with his father, should he come to hear of it, wished us to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton, the license being in that name, and we also signing the register so."

"Alice, my cousin is a scoundrel. But there is no time to lose, my uncle is in bad health, and he must see the boy before it is too late. You must let me take him up to London, where the family now are, to-morrow. Trust h m with me; he shall come to no harm; remember, though he is my cousin's child, he is also yours; and as such his welfare and his safety are sacred charges for me."

"Oh, I cannot part with him; he is my all!"

"Have I not said that I will guard him as my own life, and bring him safely back to you? Trust me!"

She yielded at length to his earnest entreaty, and consented to his proposal, promising that the boy should be in readiness to accompany him on the following evening.

It was a difficult task that he had set himself, and he was, in his own mind, by no means confident of success. Still, in the boy's interest; for the mother's sake, it must be attempted, good chance or ill.

George was a favourite with his uncle, and when a day or two after, he put the matter before him, the old earl, although not exactly sympathetic, was disposed to do the right thing.

But he made it clear to his nephew that his motives were purely based upon a sense of justice and family honour, and absolutely untinged by sentimentality or mere feeling.

"If Lady Harbleton," he said, "was so foolish as to be deceived by Mervyn's, tongue, I've no pity for her; she must suffer for her folly. The boy, of course, cannot be held to blame, and it is solely because it is his right, that I shall make arrangements at once for his proper education and so on. You may, however, inform Lady Harbleton that a sum of £1,000 per annum will be at her disposal from this date, but that all exp nditure on account of my grandson will be borne by me, and quite exclusive of her allowance. Have you heard from Harbleton lately? I have received nothing from Africa for months."

"No, he must be either ill or wounded. I am going up Pall Mall presently, and will call in at the War Office to see if I can hear anything."

But he was spared the journey.

While putting on his hat and gloves a cablegram was handed to him:

> Captain Lord Harbleton, 2nd Life Guards, succumbed to entoric last night.—BLOEMFONTEIN.

* * * * *

She had heard briefly from him this morning, that he and Mervyn would arrive mid-day; and she was at the door watching the road, which, at the distance of half-a-mile, disappeared round the lower slope of the hill.

He had said no more than that he had news for her. She at once connected this with her little Mervyn's meeting with his grandfather, and what the latter had said and done.

That a cloud had been lifted for her, the cloud of her later life, she did not dream, and that because the memory of a great mistake had worked out its certain and only conclusion.

At last she saw the little dog-cart from the inn turning the hill corner, and the vigorous waving of a handkerchief. Within a few minutes she had her treasure in her arms again.

George stood looking at the picture, and she noticed a brightness, a hopefulness in his eyes that was lacking when they last parted.

She extended her one free hand to him (the other was round her boy) and he ?—he just, without a word, placed the cable message in her hand.

* * * * *

Twelve months afterwards he journeyed again to Ardlene.

His object was but to hear one word from Alice's lips, and, as a faithful chronicler, I am bound to record that word was spoken.

RALPH ENDERBY.

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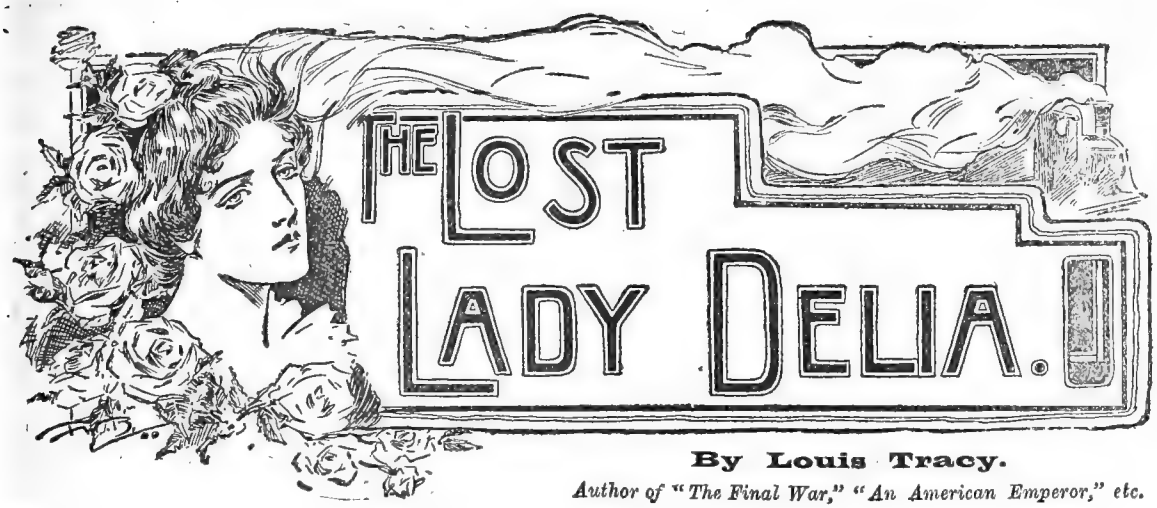

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few da s later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with he piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

It is shown by this time that Mensmore (who is at Genoa) had previously adopted the name of Pyne. The real Pyne (his mining partner) writes him that their property is likely to bring them much wealth

Pyne arrives in England and takes Mensmore's flat, where the detectives surprise him.

CHAPTER XX. *(continued).*

"I DON'T know what you're talking about, gentlemen," said Pyne, pocketing his revolver; "but it dawns upon me that I shan't be required either to shoot anybody or sleep in gaol to-night."

Winter turned on him fiercely:

"Why didn't you answer my questions properly, and save all this nonsense?"

"I'll tell you why, sir. The name of a friend of mine has been mentioned. Herbert Mensmore has been more than a brother to me. I allowed you meant mischief to him, as you thought you were talking to him all the while. I don't know much about you, but I hope that your first action would not be to give away your chum if he was in trouble."

The detective did not answer, though his look of astonishment at Pyne's declaration of motive was eloquent enough.

"Before we quit this business," went on the American, "Let me say one thing. Any man who tells you that Herbert Mensmore murdered a woman is telling you a lie. I don't know anything about this Lady Delia or how she may have died, but I do know my friend. He's rare good in a tight place, but, to think of him killing a woman—Jehosh, it's sickening."

Mrs. Robinson burst in, with face aflame:

"Is this palaverin' to go on all night?" she demanded angrily. "Here's the dinner spilin', after all me worry and bother, with the head of me vexed to know who is the masther and who isn't."

"All right, mother," laughed Pyne. "Bring in the whole caboodle."

"Mr. Pyne," said Brett, "I hope you will come and have lunch with me to-morrow, at this address," handing him a card. "I want to have a talk with you. Mr. Winter, if you will come with me I will explain a good deal to you of which you are now in ignorance."

"Surely Mr. Pyne will answer a few questions first," said the detective.

"Don't you think you have troubled him sufficiently for this evening? Besides, he can tell us nothing. All the explanation is really due to him, and I propose to give it to him to-morrow. Come, Winter, this time I promise you that a considerable portion of your inquiry shall be cleared up, and I do not speak without foundation as you have often learnt hitherto."

So the mysterious Sydney H. Pyne was left in undisturbed possession of his flat and his dinner, whilst the trio passed out into the quietude of the streets.

CHAPTER XXI.

How Lady Delia Left Raleigh Mansions.

MR. WINTER was actually inclined to preserve silence whilst they walked to Victoria Street. The events of the preceding hour had not exactly conduced to the maintenance, in the eyes of his brother officer, of that pre-eminent sagacity which he invariably claimed.

His companion rubbed in this phase of the matter by saying: "I should think, Jim, you will give Raleigh Mansions a wide berth for some time to come, after making two bad breaks there."

But it was no part of Brett's scheme that Winter should be rendered desperate by repeated failures. "It is not Mr.

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Winter's fault," he said, "that these errors have occurred. They are rather the result of his pertinacity in leaving no clue unsolved which promises to lead to success. When this case ends, if ever it does end, I feel sure he will admit that he has never encountered so much difficulty before in unravelling the most complex problems within his experience."

"That is so," chimed in the senior detective. "The thing that beats me in this affair is the want of a beginning, so to speak. One would imagine it the work of a lunatic if Lady Delia herself had not contributed so curiously to the mystery of her disappearance."

"There you are, Winter; that is the true scent. Find the motive and we find the murderer, if Lady Delia was wilfully put to death."

"If she was, Mr. Brett? Have you any doubt about it?"

"There cannot be certainty when we are groping in the dark. But the gloom is passing; we are on the eve of discovery."

At Brett's residence Winter's colleague left him. Soon the barrister and the policeman were sitting in Brett's sitting-room before a good fire.

There Reggie took him step by step through each branch of his inquiry as it is known to the reader.

He omitted nothing. The discovery of Jane Harding and of Mensmore, the latter's transactions with Dodge and Co., his dramatic *coup* at Monte Carlo and its attendant love episode—all these were exhaustively described. He enlarged upon Mrs. Hillmer's anxiety when the tragedy became known to her, and did not forget Sir Charles Lyle's amazement at the suggestion that his old playmate might prove to be responsible for the death of his wife.

He produced the waxen moulds of the piece of iron found on the body at Putney, and the ornamental scroll from which it had been taken.

At this bit of evidence Mr. Winter's complacency quite forsook him. Thus far he had experienced a feeling of resentment against Brett for having concealed from him so much that was material to their investigation.

But when he realised that a powerful link in the chain of facts had all along been placidly resting before his eyes his distress was evident, and the barrister came to his rescue.

"You are not to blame, Winter," he said, "for having failed to note many things which I have now told you. You are the slave of a system. Your method works admirably for the detection of commonplace crime, but as soon as the higher region of romance is reached it is as much out of place as a steam-roller in a lady's boudoir. Look at the remarkable series of crimes the English police have failed to solve of late, merely because some bizarre element has intruded itself at the outset. Have you ever read any of the works of Edgar Allan Poe?"

The detective answered in the affirmative. He well remembered the murders of the Rue Morgue and the mystery of Marie Rouget.

"Well," went on Brett, "there you have accurate examples of my meaning. Poe would not have been puzzled for an hour by the vagaries of Jack the Ripper. He would have said at once—most certainly after the third or fourth in the series of murders—'This is the work of an athletic lunatic, with a morbid love of anatomy and a morbid hatred for a certain class of women. Look for him amongst young men who have pestered doctors with outrageous theories, and who possess weak-minded or imbecile relatives.' Then, again, take the murder on the South Western Railway. Do you think Poe would have gone about questioning bartenders or inquiring into abortive love affairs? Not he! Jealous swains do not carry pestles about with them to slay their sweethearts, nor do they choose a four-minutes' interval between suburban stations for their frenzied methods of avowing pass on. Here you have the clear trail of a clever lunatic, dropping from the skies, as it were, and disappearing in the same erratic manner. That is why I tell you most emphatically that neither you nor I have yet the remotest conception as to who really killed Lady Delia."

"Surely, Mr. Brett, things look black now against this Mr. Mensmore?"

"Do they? How would it have fared with an acquaintance of one of the unfortunate women killed by the Ripper had the police found him in the locality with fresh bloodstains on his clothes? What would have resulted from the discovery of a chemist's mortar among the possessions of one of Elizabeth Camp's male friends? Come, now, be honest, and tell me."

But Mr. Winter could only smoke in silence.

"Therefore," continued Brett, "let us ask ourselves why, and how, it was possible for Mensmore to commit this crime. Personally, notwithstanding all that we apparently know against him circumstantially, I should hardly believe Mensmore if he confessed himself to be the murderer!"

"Now, why on earth do you say that, Mr. Brett?"

"Because Mensmore is normal and this crime abnormal. Because the man who would blow out his brains on account of losses at pigeon-shooting never had brains enough to dispose of the body in such fashion. Because Mensmore, having temporarily changed his name for some trivial reason, would never resume it with equal triviality with this shadow upon his life?"

"Then why have you told me all these things that tell so heavily against him?"

"In order that, this time at least, you may feel that the production of a pair of handcuffs does not satisfactorily settle the entire business."

"I promise you there shall be no more arrests until this affair is much more decided than it is at present."

"Good. I shall make a detective of you after my own heart in time."

"Yet I cannot help being surprised, Mr. Brett, at the very strange fact that his own sister should seem to suspect him!"

"Ah. Now you have struck the true line. Why did she have that fear? There I am with you entirely. Let us ascertain that and I promise you an important development. Mrs. Hillmer and Mensmore are both concerned in the disappearance of Lady Delia, yet neither knew that she had disappeared, and both are deeply upset by it, for Mrs. Hillmer flies off to warn her brother, and the brother posts back to London the moment it comes to his ears through her. There, you see, we have a key which may unlock many doors. For Heaven's sake let it not be battered out of shape the instant it reaches our hands."

But Mr. Winter was quite humble. "As I have told you, Mr. Brett," he said, "I have done with the battering process."

"I am sure of it. And now listen to the most remarkable fact that has yet come to light. Lady Delia's body was taken from Raleigh Mansions to Putney in a four-wheeler. The cabman was forthwith locked up by the police and clapped into prison for three months. He was released yesterday, and will be here within the next quarter of an hour."

The detective's hair nearly rose on end at this statement, "Look here, Mr. Brett!" he cried, "have you any more startlers up your sleeve, or is that the finish?"

"That is the last shot in my locker."

"I'm jolly glad! I half-expected that the next thing you would say was that you did the job yourself!"

"It wouldn't be the first time you thought that; eh, my friend?"

Winter positively blushed. "Oh! that's chaff," he said. "But why the dickens did the police lock up this cabman—the only witness we could lay our hands upon? Why, I myself questioned every cabman in the vicinity several times."

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"Because he got drunk on the proceeds of the journey, and subsequently thought he was Phaeton driving the chariot of the sun. But, there, he will tell you himself. I met him yesterday morning outside Holloway Gaol, and persuaded him to come here to-night, provided that he has not gone on the spree again with disastrous results."

The entrance of Smith—obviously relieved to see his master and the "'tec" on such good terms—to announce the arrival of "Mr. William Marsh," settled any doubts as to the cabman's intentions, and his appearance established the fact of his sobriety. Three months "hard" had made the cab-driver a new man.

Recognition was mutual between him and Mr. Winter.

"Hallo, Foxey," cried the latter. "It's you, is it?"

"Me it is, guv'nor; but I didn't know there was to be a 'cop' here." This with a suspicious glance at Brett and a backward movement towards the door.

"Do not be alarmed," said Brett. "This gentleman's presence means no harm to you. We want you to help us, and if you do so willingly I will make up that lost fiver you got for driving two people to Putney the night you were arrested."

The poor old cabman became very confused at this staggering remark. Up to that moment he regarded Brett as the agent for a charitable association, and there was no harm, he told his "missus," in trying to "knock him for a bit."

He stood nervously fumbling with his hat, but did not answer. Winter knew how to deal with him.

"Sit down, Foxey, and have a drink. You need one to cheer you up. Answer this gentleman's questions. He means you no harm."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!"

"Well, I don't mind if I do. No soda, thank you, sir. Just a small drop of water. Ah, that's better stuff 'n they keep in Holloway."

Thus fortified, Marsh had no hesitation in telling them what he knew. Substantially, his story was identical with the version given to Brett by the ticket-collector.

"Can you describe the gentleman?" said Brett.

"No, sir. He was just like any other swell. Tall and well-dressed, and talked in the haw-haw style. It might ha' been yerself for all I could tell."

Brett smiled.

"Do you think it was I?"

Foxey scratched his head.

"No, p'r'aps it wasn't, now I come to rec'llect. He 'ad a moustache, and you 'aven't. Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but you 'ave a bit of the cut of a parson or a hactor, an' this chap wasn't neither—just an everyday sort of toff."

"Could you swear to him if you saw him?"

"That I couldn't, sir. I am a rare 'and at langwidge, but I couldn't manage that."

"Why?"

"Because that night, sir, I were as full as a tick when I started. Lord love you, it must 'ave poured out of me afterwards when I started fightin' coppers. Mr. Winter, 'e knows, I ain't no fightin' man as a rule."

"And the lady? Did you see her?"

"No, sir. Leastways, I seed a bundle which I took to be a lady, but her face was covered up with a shawl, and she was lyin' 'eavy in 'is arms as though she was mortal bad. He tell'd me she was sick."

"Did he? Anything else?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure it was a shawl?"

A vacuous smile spread over Foxey's countenance as he answered: "I ain't sure of anythink that 'appened that night."

"But were you not surprised when a man took your cab under such peculiar circumstances, and paid you such a high fare?"

"We four-wheelers are surprised at nothink, sir. You

KING PHILIP AND OTHERS.

"King Philip," says a Spanish historian, "was liable to die any day from one of the violent attacks of indigestion and biliousness to which he was subject."

Well, if he had died nobody would have cried; yet better men than he was have died by myriads of the same complaint. Yes, and men who were a loss to their fellows too.

"With great and high folks," said Douglas Jerrold, "whenever a sickness shows itself in a family, it is treated with so much pomp and ceremony it can't make up its mind to leave."

Perhaps so; yet those of us who have a living to earn always want the sickness to leave just as soon as we can coax it or compel it to go.

On this very matter of biliousness it is Mrs. Sarah Binks who says:—"For fifteen years I have been liable to bilious attacks and had to be very careful about my eating.

"If I catch cold or get run down a bit I am almost sure—or used to be sure—to be bilious and sometimes very sick.

"I can always tell when one of these spells is coming on; my tongue gets furry and tastes nasty, and I feel good for nothing.

"Only those who are bothered with a sluggish liver know how miserable and wretched an attack of this kind makes one feel."

(Exactly. It is, as Prior says, "the solid stroke of the stomach and the liver that tells us what's o'clock." When they go wrong! Ah!)

"But," continues Mrs. Binks, "no matter how bad I feel one dose of Mother Seigel's Syrup always puts me right,—especially if I am able to sit down quietly for an hour after I have taken it.

"The Syrup settles my stomach and not only makes me hungry but helps me digest whatever I eat. It seems to get right whatsoever is wrong inside and then I feel fit and well again.

"I have often given a dose of Seigel's Syrup to girls suffering from sick headache and it has never failed to relieve them.

"Whatever else comes and goes there is one thing I keep in the house all the time—a bottle of Seigel's Syrup." Sarah Binks, 14 Lennox Street, Kirkstall Road, Leeds, February 23rd, 1900.

Mr. George Smith is a grocer and carrier, and lives at Garton, near Driffield, Yorks. He is constitutionally troubled with wind or gas, from indigestion. The only thing, he says, that does him any good is Seigel's Syrup. With care in his diet it will soon make him a young man at sixty.

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don't know all wot goes on in kebs. Why, once crossin' Waterloo Bridge——"

"Never mind Waterloo Bridge, Foxey," put in the detective. "Keep all your wits on as much as you can remember of November 6."

"Where did he tell you to drive to?" went on Brett.

"Just Putney. I was to drive my hardest. 'I rec'llect wantin' to pull up at the Three Bells, but 'e put 'is 'ead out an' said, 'Go on, driver. I'm awfully late already.' So on I went."

"Where did you stop?"

"I don't know no more than the child unborn. By that time the drink was yeastin' up in me. The fare kept me on the road 'e wanted by shoutin'. When we pulled up, 'e carries 'er into a lane. There was a big house there. I know that all right. After a bit 'e comes back an' tips me a fiver. With that I whips up the old 'oss and gets back to the Three Bells. You know the rest, as the girl said when she axed the Bench to——"

"Yes, we know the rest," interrupted Brett, "but I fear you are not able to help us much."

"This isn't a five-pun job, eh, guv'nor?" said Foxey anxiously.

"Hardly, at present. We shall see. Can you say exactly where you drew up your cab when the lady was carried into it?"

"Sure as death," replied the cabman, in the hope that his information might yet be valuable. "It was outside Raleigh Mansions, Sloane Square."

"We know that——"

"It seems to me, sir, as ye know as much about the business as I do," broke in Marsh.

"Were you in the Square or in Sloane Street?"

"In Sloane Street, of course. Right away from the Square."

"Not so very far away, surely?"

Foxey was doubtful. His memory was hazy, and he feared lest he should be mistaken. "No, no," he said quickly, "not far, but still well in the street."

"Were there many people about?"

"You could hardly tell, sir, it was that foggy and nasty. If the lydy 'ad bin dead nobody would have noticed her that night."

"Did anyone beside yourself see the gentleman carrying the lady into the cab?"

"I think not. I don't remember anybody passin' at the time."

"Did the gentleman keep your cab waiting long at the kerb before he brought the lady out?"

"It might ha' bin a minute or two."

"No longer?"

"Well, sir, it's 'ard for me to say, especially after bein' away for a change of 'ealth, so to speak."

"Did not the lady speak or move in any manner?"

"Not so far as I know, sir."

"And do you mean to tell me that, although you had been drinking, you were not astonished at the whole business?"

"I never axes my fares any questions 'cept when they say 'By the hour'. Then I wants to know a bit."

"Yes; but this carrying of a lady out of a house in such a fashion—did not this strike you as strange?"

"Strange, bless your 'eart, sir. You ought to see me carting 'em off from the Daffodil Club after a big night—three and four in one keb, all blind, paralytic."

"No doubt; but this is not the Daffodil Club at daybreak. It was a respectable neighbourhood at seven o'clock, or thereabouts, on a winter's evening."

"It ain't my fault," said Foxey doggedly. "What was wrong with the lydy? Was it a habduction?"

"The lady was dead—murdered, we believe."

The cabman's face grew livid with anxiety.

"Oh, crikey, Mr. Winter," he cried, addressing the detective, "I knew nothink about it."

"No one says you did, Foxey," was the reply. "Don't you get frightened. We just want you to help us as far as you can, and not to get skeered and lose your wits."

Thus reassured, Marsh mopped his head and said solemnly:

"I will do wot lies in my power, gentlemen both, but I wish I 'adn't bin so blamed drunk that night."

"You say you would not recognise your fare if you saw him," continued Brett. "Could you tell us, if you were shown a certain person, that he was *not* the man. You might not be sure of the right man, but you might be sure regarding the wrong one."

"Yes, sir. It wasn't you, and it wasn't Mr. Winter, and it wasn't a lot of other people I know. I think if I saw the man who really got into my keb, I would be able to swear that he was like him, at any rate."

"All right. That will do for the present. Leave us your address, so that we may find you again if necessary. Here is a sovereign for you."

When Marsh had left them, Brett turned to the detective.

"Well," he said, "if Mensmore were here now, I suppose you would want to lock him up."

"No," said Winter, "the more I learn about this affair the more mixed it becomes. Still, I don't deny but I shall be glad to have Mensmore's explanation of his movements at that time. And so will you, Mr. Brett."

CHAPTER XXII.

A Wilful Murder.

Brett sent a telegram to Mrs. Hillmer at Paris. "Matters satisfactorily arranged pending your arrival," he wired, and early on Monday morning he received a reply.

"Due Charing Cross 7.30 p.m. Will drive straight to your chambers with my brother.—Gwendoline Hillmer."

He forwarded the message with a note to Mr. Winter, asking him to be present.

About one o'clock Pyne turned up.

"Guess I slept well last night after the excitement," he said with a pleasant smile. "You seemed to skeer those chaps more with a few words, Mr. Brett, than I did with a revolver."

"The English police are not so much afraid of revolvers as they are of making mistakes," was the answer.

"Now, is that so? On our side they wouldn't have stopped to argy. Both of 'em would have drawn on me at once."

"Then I am glad for everybody's sake, Mr. Pyne, that the affair happened in London."

"Why, sure. But tell me. Has my friend Mensmore been getting himself into trouble?"

"Not so much as it looks. Others appear to have involved him without his knowledge, and he has lent colour to the accusations by his involuntary actions of a suspicious nature."

"Well, if it is permissible, I should like to hear the straight story."

Under the circumstances Brett felt that this stranger from America had a right to know why he was in such danger of being arrested during his first twenty-four hours' residence in the country, so he gave him a succinct narrative of the *prima facie* case against Mensmore.

Pyne listened in silence to the recital. When it ended he said:

"Mr. Brett, my friend was incapable of murdering any woman. He was equally incapable of conducting any discreditable liaison with any woman. I have known him for years, and a straighter, truer, more honourable man I never met. I don't know what his reason was for assuming my name, which he undoubtedly did, as the agent called this morning, and I find the flat is taken in my name."

"What did you say?"

(To be continued.)

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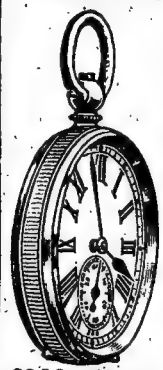

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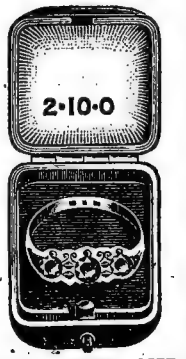

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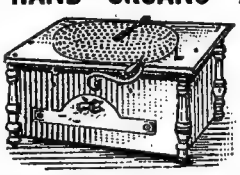

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

LAST week I announced briefly that I had several new features in contemplation for *Short Stories*. I should like to say a word or two about them here.

In the first place, I have been fortunate enough to secure for exclusive publication in this country a series of stories by Mr. R. Norman Silver, whose last novel, "A Daughter of Mystery," was recently followed day by day by eager hundreds of thousands in the *Daily Express*.

The tales which Mr. Norman Silver has written for *Short Stories* will appear under the general title of

"A Keeper of Secrets,"

and will deal with incidents in the life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the famous West-end solicitor.

These stories, which will begin next week, will be complete in each number, and will be found to be of a most engrossing nature. Indeed, in my humble opinion, the doings of Hugo Pontifex will seize the popular mind with a hold as tenacious as did the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Nikola. The character, indeed, although a quite distinct type from those famous creations of the novelists, has all the intense, almost uncanny, fascination which they possessed. Dramatic and romantic enough to suit the most exacting reader, the stories have the added merit of being founded on fact.

Here is the author's foreword regarding Hugo Pontifex, which will give the reader some inkling of the kind of stories he may expect:

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To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured and safely buried, mystery after mystery of terrible import to Ma fair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

Another series of stories which is bound to prove popular will be "Tales Told Off Duty."

These will be told by various people, and will comprise stories by soldiers, sailors, detectives, prison-warders, doctors, divers, firemen; indeed, every kind of person into whose lives there enters a large element of adventure and excitement.

As with the other series, so will these tales be complete in each number.

And now I wish to seize what seems to me a fitting opportunity to make a request to you. I want you to help *Short Stories* by securing new readers. Widely known as the paper is, there are still some people who do not read it with that regularity which I should desire. It is within your power to help me in this connection, and I shall feel much obliged if you will do so by bringing the paper under the notice of your brother or sister, or somebody else's brother or sister. One of the chief charms of *Short Stories* is that it appeals equally to both sexes. I am sure I can rely on your doing your best.

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